BOOK VII

Seventh Centum – First Decad (VII-1)
(Uḷ nilāviya)

Preamble

In Bhagavad Gīta (VII-14), the Lord stated that those who take refuge in Him alone can get beyond Māyā (Prakṛti). Then and then only, the 'Prakṛti' helps towards liberation instead of hindering by concealing the real nature of the Lord. The net woven around each individual soul by the Almighty Lord, in the light of past Karma, has to be disentangled by Him alone, seeing that we are much-too-feeble and cannot disentangle even the nest built by a frail bird, in the manner it does. Only He can undo this bondage of ours, when we clasp His holy feet as the Sole Saviour. It was against this background that the Āḻvār sought refuge at the feet of the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam in VI-10-10. But then, it didn't yield the desired result immediately. Why was it so?

Who indeed can question the love and integrity of Bharata who did 'Prapatti' (surrender) unto Śrī Rāma, begging of Him to get back to Ayodhyā and take up the reins of the Kingdom? Why did Bharat's surrender not meet with quick response? Well, the Ṛṣhīs of Daṇḍakāraṇya had surrendered unto Rāma earlier and He had promised them succour from the depredations of the Rākṣasas. Bound by this earlier commitment, Śrī Rāma could not obviously comply with Bharata's request. Even so, some would appear to have surrendered unto the Lord prior to the point of time at which the Āḻvār did 'Prapatti', praying that they be blest with hymns *par excellence* for their uplift. As a matter of fact, the clue to this kind of inference can be had in X-7-5 which indicates the root-cause for the emergence of Tiruvāymoḻi, as such. That crucial stanza brings out: The sages met at a conclave and decided that they should pray unto the Lord for the birth of a work of this kind, which will do adequate justice in bringing out the Lord's inherent nature, form, attributes, wealth and deeds. This was again due to the fact that they found the Sanskrit Vedantās (upaniṣads), meant to expatiate on the Lord's greatness and grandeur, lagging far behind and retreating, admitting defeat- 'yato vāco nivartante'. The Lord Himself sang the Tiruvāymoḻi

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through Saint Nammāḻvār as His mouthpiece. Once Tiruvāymoḷi came into being, the sages found it had done full Justice to their cherished objectives and fully covered the various facets of the Lord, enumerated above, with the result that they very much wished that the Lord had still more attributes, treasures etc., so that they can have another work of such excellence, a complete reversal of their attitude towards the Upaniṣads.

And so, it is clear that the Lord deliberately delayed the consummation of the Āḻvār's 'Prapatti' so as to get all the 1102 hymns from his sweet lips, the full length of this splendid treatise which would have otherwise remained truncated.

In this decad, the Āḻvār follows up the trend of thought as in VI-9-9 where he dreaded the mischief of the senses and the frightful possibility of his going astray in the event of the prolongation of his stay in this abode. It might, however, be questioned why the Āḻvār, who was well beyond the mischief of the senses, having taken a deep plunge into the ocean of divine consciousness, should dread in this manner. For this, the Āḻvār has himself provided the answer. This land is notorious for its corrupting influence, bringing within its dirty pale even the 'Nitya Sūrīs', the Attendants in close proximity to the Lord in Heaven, should they ever happen to come on to this soil. Further, when a person sees the houses all around, on fire, he has got to apprehend the danger of his own house catching fire and safeguard it. A rope lying by the side of an anti-hill, the hide-out of serpents, is easily mistaken for a serpent. So also, the Āḻvār possessing a body like unto that of the worldlings, grows apprehensive about himself, finding those other persons dominated by the wayward senses.

uḷ nilāviya aivarāl kumaitīrri, eṉṉai uṉ pātapaṅkayam
naṉṉilāvakaiyē nalivāṉ, iṉṉum eṉṉukiṉṟāy:
eṉ ilāp peru māyaṉē! imaiyōrkaḷ ēttum ulakam mūṉṟu uṭai
aṉṉalē! amutē! appaṉē! eṉṉai āḻvāṉē! (VII–1–1)

Translation

Oh, my nectarean Lord, Benefactor great, adored by Celestials, Māyā (Matter) of dimensions unlimited You have at Your disposal,

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My Sire, Master of all the worlds, do You intend this vassal
To be tormented by the senses five within, still,
So that I attain not Your lotus feet lovely?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār questions the propriety of his being made a prey to the senses haunting him from within, by being kept still in this body by the Lord. Unlike the external enemies who are quite visible and inflict injuries through weapons etc., the five senses, constituting the hidden enemies, torment the individual souls in ever so many ways, a very pathetic and intolerable situation indeed. But then, why should the Āḻvār blame the Lord for this?

(ii) Of the numerous names borne by the Lord, 'Hṛṣikeśa' is one; He is the Controller of the senses (Hṛṣikam), Ṛṣi Udaṅka approached Lord Kṛṣṇa and queried him thus: "Both kurus and Pāṇḍus are equal to Thee. oh, Lord, and yet, you have caused the destruction of the former while the treatment of the latter has been quite the opposite. How can you be partial?" Lord Kṛṣṇa adduced many a reason for His preference for one party as against the other and ended by pointing out to the sage that Duryodhana and his party were found obstinately averse to all righteousness, despite His indefatigable efforts to turn them from their evil ways, the Kurus had a perversity of will which would not listen to any persuasion and so on. The Ṛṣi, however, coolly retaliated, "But, my Lord, You could certainly have predisposed them also for righteousness".

(iii) The Āḻvār is indeed frightfully agitated as to why he should be kept in this body, exposed to the vagaries of the unruly senses, even after his taking refuge at the feet of the Lord. A learned dissertation on the why and wherefore of this posture can be found in 'Śrīvacana

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Bhūṣaṇam' where the illustrious Piḷḷailōkācārya has admirably elucidated, as follows :

The 'Prapanna', that is, a person who has surrendered himself to the loving grace and protection of the Lord, passes time in this world, between revelling in the glory of God and His devotees and contemplation of his own short-comings. Contemplation of his short-comings incites fear of the dreadful possibility of prolongation of the cycle of births and rebirths but the antidote for this lies in recounting the Lord's auspicious qualities of love, mercy, etc., which at once dispels such fears. If, on the other hand, he thought in terms of his own spiritual equipment and advancement as sure hopes for his salvation and tried thereby to get over the fear in question, it would indeed be a case of virtue defeating itself, a self-defeating virtue clouded by conceit. Even as Saint Nammāḻvār has complained in this song, Saint Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār feels terribly panicky about the forbidding prospect of the Lord still condemning him to life inside the mother's womb and, on this account, feels insecure like the tree standing on the fringe of a river, which could be uprooted any moment by floods. This fear and the resultant reproach from these Āḻvārs, however, stem from their intimate bonds with the Lord Whom they regard as their Sole Sustainer. This is just like the child playing in the streets, sustaining an injury at play, rushing home, crying and beating the mother for her apparent slackness in preventing the injury. Apart from their eternal and inviolable bond of relationship, the Lord is Omnipotent and could easily wipe off the malaise of His subjects. And now, considering the relationship between the creatures and the Creator as between children and Mother, it would appear as if God stands responsible for everything that befalls the creatures. For instance, if a child fell into a well, they would hold the mother as blameworthy for her failure to keep a watchful eye on the child and prevent the occurrence. Had she not permitted the child to walk up to the edge of the well, the child would not have fallen into the well.

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If non-removal of the child from the vicinity of the well could be construed as permission granted for its stay there, it might as well be argued that it is the same permissive attitude of the Lord that is responsible for the individual straying away from the Lord and getting bogged down in the difficult terrain of ' Samsāra '. Well, this is not the case. Even as the consent of the Individual to submit himself to the Lord's protection is not the cause of the benevolent protection eventually extended by the Lord and it is His own redemptive grace that matters, permission granted by the Lord for the individual's stay in ' Samsāra ' is not responsible for the latter's downward trend. Actually, it is the Lord's command that the subjects should conform to the dictates of the Śāstras and work their way up to Him. It is, therefore, but natural that He expects the subjects to show due regard to the Śāstraic decree and injunctions and develop love for Him. In the final analysis however, it turns out that the subjects get stranded over here, enjoying the fruits of their own ' Karma ' and it is only the Lord's spontaneous grace that pulls them out of the morass.

(iv) As stated in para 3, above, recounting the Lord's auspicious qualities of love, mercy etc. dispels one's fears. It is worth noting that in every song in this decad the Āḻvār cries forth his fears in the first two lines (*as per original text*), while he dwells upon the Lord's glory and grandeur in the next two lines. As Piḷḷai Tirunarayūr Araiyar put it, the first two lines of each song in this decad are like the outbursts of a child right from the mouth of a tiger facing the Mother in front (In the English rendering of the songs the position is, however, reversed).

eṉṉai aḻum vaṉ kō ōr aintu ivai peytu, irāppakal mōtu-uṉṉai nāṉ aṇukā vakai ceytu, pōtikaṇṭāy: [vittiṭṭu, kaṉṉale! amutē! kār mukil vaṇṇaṉē! kaṭal-ñāḻam kākkiṉṟa miṉṉu nēmiyiṇāy! viṇaiyēṉuṭai vētiyaṉē! (VII–1–2)

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Translation

My most delicious Nectar, Oh, cloud-hued Lord, You wield
The radiant discus which does the ocean-bound worlds shield
Well beyond this sinner's reach, You are by Vedas comprehended,
Me You have consigned to the senses five and their cruel sway
Day and night, and thus from You have kept me away.

Notes

(i) *Āḻvār to the Lord*: My Lord, why should You at all endow me with the refractory senses, which upset the natural order of things and hold me in their cruel grip, day and night? You are so far away that I can't even cry out my woes to you. The natural order of things would be: The individual soul is the vassal of the Lord, the mind is subordinate to the individual and the senses are under the immediate control of the mind, the overall control of the mind and the senses vesting in the Individual. But what is the position now? It is the bottom-most member of the hierarchy that keeps the top-most under its heels!

(ii) *Lord to the Āḻvār*: Oh, Āḻvār, Why do you despise these ancillaries which can be harnessed to the best possible use? The ears can listen to discourses on Me, the tongue can sing My praise, the eyes can behold Me and My devotees, the nostrils can enjoy the sweet odour of the sacred basil (tuḷaci) offered to Me and the body can get locked in My sweet embrace.

(iii) *Āḻvār to the Lord*: If the senses can subserve me in the manner outlined by You, I would certainly love them most. But, it is the other way round and they only distract me from my single-minded devotion unto You and hence my complaint about my continued stay in this explosive setting. It is like Your presenting the fake-deer before Sītā and putting her into the hands of the seven hundred odd Rākṣasīs in Laṅkā, who teased and tormented her.

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(iv) *Lord to the Āḻvār*: In the untoward contingency of the senses overpowering you, better let me know so that I do apply the necessary remedies.

(v) *Āḻvār to the Lord*: But then, my Lord, You are quite out of hand and I am not in a position to lodge my complaint. Had You not unravelled unto me Your glorious Form, I would jolly well like to be in the company of the senses unmindful of You. But now, I just dread every moment the mischief of the senses which might lead me astray. And You keep Yourself away, out of sight, as if You have to be comprehended only through the Vedas instead of my enjoying You through direct perception!

vētiyāṉiṟkum aivarāl viṉaiyēṉai mōtuvittu, uṉ tiruvaṭic
cātiyāvakai nī taṭuttu, eṉ peṟuti? antō!
āṭi āki, akal-iṭam paṭaittu, uṇṭu, umiḻntu, kaṭantu, iṭantiṭṭa
cōti nīḷ muṭiyāy! toṇṭaṉēṉ matucūtaṉaṉē! (VII–1–3)

Translation

Oh Lord, sporting the long crown radiant, the worlds You did create
And gulped them down during deluge and later spat out,
You spanned them once and again, from deep waters, pulled out;
Oh, Slayer of Matu, You did enthral me but then, shut me out
From Your lovely feet, flocking me against the senses with no respite,
Alas! this sinner knows not how, by this, You do profit.

Notes

(i) The Scriptures enjoin that the Brahmins should tend the ritualistic (sacramental) fire throughout life and stipulate the morning and the evening as the periods during which it should be done. The Āḻvār, however, yearned to serve the Lord all his life without any intermission whatever. But what is happening? He is cruelly dominated by the wayward senses without break.

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(ii) The wondrous deeds of the Lord, mentioned in this song reveal Him as the Benign Sustainer, but the question now is, why He does not play the same beneficent role, in the case of the Āḻvār also, without keeping him under the terrific clutches of the malignant senses.

cūtu nāṉ aṟiyāvakai cuḷaṟṟi, ōr aivaraik kāṭṭi, uṉ aṭip
pōtu nāṉ aṇukāvakai ceytu, pōtikaṇṭāy:
yātum yāvarum iṉṟi niṉ akampāḷ oṭukki, òr āliṉ nīḷ ilai-
mītu cēr kuḷavi! viṇaiyēṉ viṇaitīr maruntē! (VII–1–4)

Translation

As a mere Babe, You lay on a tender, fig-leaf, oh, Lord,
And did in a corner of Your stomach all things and beings hold;
You are the drug that cures the ills of this sinner
And yet confounding me, You did put me into the snare ;
Of the senses five, on the sly, keeping me very far
From Your lotus feet, invisible and far off that You are.

Notes

The Āḻvār bitterly complains that:

(i) The Lord, who had weaned him away from the mischief of the senses and cured him of all his sins, has now exposed him to the serious risk of slipping back to his old ways;

(ii) The Lord has bewildered the Āḻvār who was looking upon His feet as the Sole Refuge, by bringing him once again under the cruel spell of the five senses and

(iii) The Lord has kept aloof from him, lest He should have to shed His grace on him, in case He stood beside him; as a matter of fact, he would have put up with any amount of torture by the senses, if only the Lord could be visualised by him, all the time.

tīr maruntu iṉṟi, aintu nōy aṭum cekkil iṭṭut tirikkum aivarai
nēr maruṅku uṭaiṭtā aṭaittu, nekiḻppāṉ okkiṉṟāy:
ār maruntu iṉi ākuvār-aṭal āḻi ēnti, acurar vaṉ kulam
vēr maruṅku aṟuttāy! viṇṇuḷār perumāṉē? ō! (VII–1–5)

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Translation

Oh, Lord of Celestials, You have cut out, root and branch,
The mighty hordes of Acurar, with Your discus radiant;
Into the grinding mill where the sense-organs will crunch
Me under the impact of the senses five, with no way out,
You have pushed me, it looks as if your hold on me
You are loosening. Who indeed will hereafter my elixir be?

Notes

(i) The grinding mill is the human body where the five senses are ever active with the relative activities and their ramifications leaving no chance for the soul to thrive, crushing it beyond recognition and making redemption impossible, even by the omnipotent Lord. By putting it down as an incurable state of affairs, the Āḻvār only stresses the severity of the impact of the senses, like unto the young warrior (Abhimanyu, the great hero of Mahābhārata) caught up inextricably in the enemy camp amidst doyens and super-doyens of warfare.

(ii) If the Lord, who is at once the Drug and the Doctor, gave up the subject, could there be any cure for the malady? How could any one survive without that infallible medicine, the Lord? That is why the text of the song is " *Who* shall be my elixir? " instead of ' *What* shall be my life-saving drug? "; the drug being an inanimate substance, is usually referred to in the neuter gender.

(iii) The Āḻvār's address to the Lord as the Chief of the Celestials is meant to stir up the feelings of the Celestials in that glorious setting of unalloyed bliss and draw their attention to his own critical condition down below. This is like unto the wailing of Sītā, during her captivity in Laṅkā.

viṇṇuḷār perumāṟku aṭimai ceyvāraiyum ceṟum aimpulaṉ ivai
maṉṉuḷ eṉṉaip peṟṟāl, eṉ ceyyā-maṟṟu nīyum viṭṭāl?
paṉṉuḷāy! kavi taṉṉuḷāy! pattiyiṉ uḷḷāy! paramīcaṉē! vantu, eṉ
kaṉṉuḷāy! neñcuḷāy? colluḷāy! oṉṟu collāyē. (VII–1–6)

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Translation

Oh, Supreme Lord, my yearning, its depth and voice You know,
Reside You do in my eyes and mind and the word I utter,
Can't You unto me come and a word of comfort utter?
The senses five will taint even the Celestials, in Your service aglow,
Should they this soil touch; what is it these won't do
In regard to poor me if I am given up by You too?

Note

Even exalted persons, in the upper regions, including the high Heavens are not above the mischief of the senses. That being so, the Āḻvār's fears are indeed well-founded, the more so, when he stays in this physical body and in this land of dark nescience. To cite but a few instances of the havoc played by the senses on noted personages, let us take first, Indra, the Chief of the Devas. Among the many atrocities committed by the formidable Narakāsura from his abode in Prāḳjyōtiṣa on Earth, was the snatching of the precious ear-rings of Aditi, Indra's mother. At Indra's request, Lord Kṛṣṇa slew the demon and went to Indra's citadel along with queen Satyabhāmā, mounted on Garuḍa to restore the ear-rings to the venerable lady. The conceited and ungrateful Indrāṇi, Indra's consort, however, thought Satyabhāmā, a mere human, living on Earth down below, unworthy of being offered the Pārijātha flower, grown exclusively in Devalokā for the exclusive use of the women-folk there. This only excited the curiosity of the distinguished visitor who managed to have the very tree uprooted by Lord Kṛṣṇa from Indrā's garden. As the divine couple were flying back to Earth on Garuḍa along with the tree in question, Indrāṇi got scent of it and at her instance, Indra, along with his soldiers, intercepted and fought a pitched battle with Lord Kṛṣṇa. The Lord made them bite the dust, resumed His flight to Earth and planted the tree in Sathyabhāmā's garden. What a disgraceful behaviour of Indra, consumed by conceit going to war with his great Benefactor, right on the heels of the help received from Him!

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And then, did Garuḍa, adorning the glorious rank of 'Nitya Sūrīs' in Heaven, fare any better ? Sumukha, the serpent, when hotly pursued by Garuḍa, took refuge at the feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa. When Garuḍa requested the Lord to part with the serpent, He declined to do so and, on the top of that, entrusted the serpent to Garuḍa's safe keeping. The mentally upset Garuḍa had then the cheek to tell the Lord: "Well, You have snatched my very food from me. Is it for this that I have been lifting you and your consorts on my back, all these days?" On another occasion, Garuḍa took pride in his immense strength and boastfully enquired of the Lord whether there was indeed any one more powerful than he, who could carry effortlessly, at the tip of his plumes, the Omnipotent Lord and His consorts. The Lord chided the presumptuous Garuḍa and disclosed to him that all the three worlds put together can hardly bear His weight and that the truth of the matter is that He supports Himself and Garuḍa who was supposed to carry Him and His consorts. So saying, He placed just one arm on Garuḍa's shoulder and asked him if he could sustain it. Poor Garuḍa fell down fainting, unable to bear the weight of a single arm of the Lord.

Sugṛīva, the monkey-king abused the kindness of Śrī Rāma and just lost count of time, immersed in the pleasures of wine and women. And then, a sage of the eminence of Viswāmitra fell an easy prey to the meretricious charms of Menaka and had a rapport with her for ten long years till he got jolted back to normal thinking.

The Supreme Lord, who holds sway all over and who can't but hear the Āḻvār's heart-rending appeal and note the depth of feeling behind it, is nevertheless holding Himself back and it is indeed a matter of deep regret for the Āḻvār.

oṉṟu colli oruttiṉil niṟkilāta ōr aivar vaṉ kayavarai
eṉṟu yāṉ velkiṟpaṉ-uṉ tiruvaruḷ illaiyēl?
aṉṟu tēvar acurar vāṅka, alaikaṭal aravam aḷāvi, ōr
kuṉṟam vaitta entāy! koṭiyeṉ paruku iṉ amutē! (VII–1–7)

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Translation

My Lord, You are the Nectar grand, by this sinner drunk,
The mountain huge You once planted in surging waters
And made the Devas and Asuras churn it with a serpent;
But for Your sweet grace how can I the senses conquer,
Notoriously fickle, not sticking to one thing or the other?'

Notes

(i) The churning episode reveals the extent to which the Lord would go to help His devotees in multifarious roles, and yet, if He does not go to the rescue of the Āḻvār, how can he at all get the better of the notoriously fickle senses?

(ii) *The Nectar grand, drunk by this sinner*: Far from being satisfied with the interior bliss with which the Lord has endowed him in super-abundance, the Āḻvār complains that this is not supplemented by external perception and experiences. Conscious of his ingratitude in not acknowledging the many favours already heaped on him by the Lord but running into a complaining mood, the Āḻvār calls himself a sinner.

iṉ amutu eṉat tōṉṟi ōr aivar yāvaraiyum mayakka, nī vaitta
muṉṉam māyam ellām muḻu vēr aṟintu, eṉṉai uṉ
ciṉṉamum tiru mūrttiyum cintittu, ēttik kaitoḻavē, aruḷ eṉakku:
eṉ ammā! eṉ kaṇṇā! imaiyōr-tam kulamutalē! (VII–1–8)

Translation

Kaṇṇā, my Lord, Chief of Celestials, Your grace I invoke
To cut out, root and branch, my age-long yoke
Unto Samsāra, the senses five under the garb of pleasures nectarean,
Which cast their spell on one and all, just your creation
And fix my mind on your insignia (the conch and discus fine)
Your Form exquisite, sing your glory and worship you, all the time.

Note

The sensual pleasures of sound, sight, smell, touch and taste, assume the garb of happiness, to begin with and eventually

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throw the participants into the abyss of endless miseries. Hence, the request of the Āḻvār that he be studiously kept beyond their mischief so that he may constantly meditate on the Lord's exquisite Form, wondrous weapons etc, sing His glory and worship Him, thus involving himself in such exclusive participation, by word, deed and thought.

kulam mutal aṭum tīviṉaik koṭu vaṉ kuḻiyiṉil vīḻkkum aivarai
valam mutal keṭukkum varamē tantaruḷkaṇṭāy—
nilam mutal iṉi ev ulakukkum niṟpaṉa, celvaṉa eṉap poruḷ
pala mutal paṭaittāy! eṉ kaṇṇā! eṉ parañcuṭarē! (VII–1–9)

Translation

My Kaṇṇā of splendour supreme, the worlds You did create
And their contents, still and mobile; of you do I entreat
To dower on me robust strength to cut out, branch and root
The senses five, breeding sins which would the entire clan uproot.

Note

The sins committed by the sense-buried affect generations, back and forth. c.f. Hanumān's advice to Rāvaṇa, that one of the latter's calibre and wisdom should desist from committing sins which shall destroy the entire race. The Āḻvār wants the Lord to dower on him the strength which will make him tougher than this tough fountain-source of all sins, so as to demolish it effectively.

eṉ parañcuṭarē! eṉṟu uṉṉai. alaṟṟi, uṉ iṇait tāmaraikaṭku
aṉpu uruki niṟkum-atu niṟka, cumaṭu tantāy;
vaṉ paraṅkaḷ eṭuttu aivar ticaiticai valittu eṟṟukiṉṟaṉar-
muṉ paravai kaṭaintu amutam koṇṭa mūrtti! o! (VII–1–10)

Translation

Oh, Lord, You churned the ocean once and delivered the nectar,
Steeped in love unto Your lotus feet, I am bound to utter
Your sweet names, oh Splendour Supreme! but this burden
(body) You did dower;

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For me to groan under its weight and the senses five do shatter
Poor me, pulling in different directions, alas! I can hardly bear.

Note

The Alvar is puzzled how the Lord gives nectar to some and the sense-bound body to some, like unto a deadly poison. The very body, dowered by Him for God-enjoyment. has deteriorated into a facile field for the foul play of the domineering senses, each pulling in a different direction; oh, what a tragic picture, like unto a Prince standing on the road-side, wearing a head-gear for carrying load, in place of his regal crown, being forced by strangers to carry their loads!

koṇṭa mūrtti ōr mūvarāyk kuṇaṅkaḷ paṭaittu aḷittuk keṭuk-puṇṭarīkak koppūḻp puṇal-paḷḷi appaṇukkē [kum ap
toṇṭar toṇṭar toṇṭar toṇṭaṇ caṭakōpaṇ col āyirattuḷ ip pattum
kaṇṭu pāṭa vallār viṇai pōm, kaṅkuḷum pakalē. (VII–1–11)

Translation

Gone are the sins of those who sing day and night these songs ten,
With understanding fine, out of the thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṇ,
The vassal of the vassals' vassals of Lord Padmānābhaṇ,
Who, as Trinity, carries out the functions of creation, preservation and dissolution
And who, during deluge, did on the vast expanse of water recline.

Notes

(i) Lord Nārāyaṇa, on whose navel emerged the lotus flower on which Brahmā appeared, carries out the triple functions of creation, sustentation and dissolution, the middle one by Himself and the other two as the Internal Controller of Brahmā and Śiva.

(ii) The Āḻvār seeks to assuage his mental agony in talking about the senses and sensuality, by going the whole hog out in the service of the devout, like unto a parched-up soul diving fast into the deep pockets of water.

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Seventh Centum—Second Decad (VII-2)
(Kaṅkulum Pakalum)

Preamble

Towards the end of the sixth centum, we saw the Āḻvār surrendering himself at the feet of the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam. Finding, however, that he was still lingering in this material world, dominated by the unruly senses, he cried out his fears in the last decad, like unto a child crying out from the tiger's jaws, facing the mother standing in front. The Lord was, no doubt, well aware of the intensity of the Āḻvār's God-love and his deep yearning to get out of the material shackles with no further delay. And yet, He deliberately prolonged the Āḻvār's stay in this abode and his resultant uneasiness, just to do lasting good to the world at large through him. Of course, this is like starving one's children and entertaining the guests. Actually, the Āḻvār wrought the miracle of transforming the very duds and the deluded, given up as incorrigibles even by the Omnipotent Lord and every moment of his stay in this abode would certainly enrich the world through the scintillating hymns flowing from his lips, both by way of adoring the Lord and advising the world.

But then, the Āḻvār, in deep anguish, is once again (figuratively) transformed as the Nāyakī (Mistress), weighed down by melancholy too deep for words. The critical condition of the speechless Nāyakī and her various moods are narrated in this decad by the (Imagined) mother to Lord Raṅganātha, enshrined in Śrīraṅgam (Tamilnadu), bending over her daughter, right in the Sanctum. The mother enquires of Lord Raṅganātha, the Sole Saviour, as to what His intentions are and how exactly He would like to deal with her love-torn daughter.

Whenever Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar discoursed on this decad, he would place both his palms over his head, charged with emotion, and cry, "How can we, hard-hearted people, incapable of feeling the pulse of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, her sentiments and yearning do justice to the words of deep love uttered by her in this decad?" How can any one indeed enter into the spirit of the Nayakī whose torrential tears were bailed out by her palms? It was like attempting to drain off the oceanic waters with a tiny leaf. c.f. Hanumān's

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enquiry as soon as he met Sītā in Aśoka vana how it was that tears kept flowing from her lovely eyes like a cascade.

kaṅkulum pakalum kaṇ tuyil aṟiyāḷ;
kaṇṇa nīr kaikaḷāl iṟaikkum;
caṅku cakkaraṅkaḷ! eṉṟu kai kūppum;
tāmaraik kaṇ! eṉṟē taḷarum;
eṅṅaṉē tarikkēṉ uṉṉai viṭṭu? eṉṉum;
iru nilam kai tuḷā irukkum—
ceṅkayal pāy nīrt tiruvaraṅkattāy!
ivaḷ tiṟattu eṉ ceykiṉṟāyē? (VII–2–1)

Translation

Oh, Lord, reclining in Tiruvaraṅkam where flows water in abundance;
And the gay fish gambol, this lady knows no sleep, day and night,
Tears in torrents from her eyes do flow and she with her palms bails them out;
Utters she with joined palms, "Oh conch,", "Oh discus", "these are the lotus eyes",
She says and reels, all earth she gropes for her Lord from whom she can't bear
Being apart, what indeed do you intend doing with her?

Notes

(i) The worldlings are steeped in sleep, both day and night, while the Celestials in Heaven have neither nights nor sleep. The Nāyakī also knows no sleep, like the Celestials. It is said that she knows no sleep instead of saying that she doesn't sleep, because when in communion with the Lord, He wouldn't allow her to sleep and, when away from Him, she is so disconsolate and dejected that she just can't sleep. Either way, sleep is unknown to her.

(ii) Tears trickling down the cheeks copiously could be a common occurrence in the case of devout contemplation of the Lord's auspicious traits and heroic deeds. Bailing out the tears with the Nāyakī's palms, denotes

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the abundance of tears like the water in the river Cauvery flowing around. Reference to the fish joyfully dancing in the river waters carries with it the suggestion that even as the fish cannot stay out of water, the Nāyakī can't stay apart from the Lord. Delirious that she is, she can still behold the Lord in His iconic Form right in front and suddenly she exclaims, " here is the conch, here is the discus, here are the lotus-eyes " and so on. As one subsisting solely on Him, she can't bear being apart from Him and she says so. Even then, she can't find Him beside her and she runs her fingers through the whole Earth in search of Him, as if He is handy, like taking sandal paste from a porcelain cup.

(iii) The mother exhibits the love-smitten Nāyakī even as the Ṛṣīs of Daṇḍakāraṇya showed Rāma their emaciated bodies, tortured and tormented by the Rākṣasas and enquires of Lord Raṅganātha what He proposes to do with her daughter, as the Lord's remembrance of the individual in the light of his ultimate redemption, is the only ' Means ' for his salvation. (see also aphorism 66 of Śrīvacanabhūṣaṇam).

eṉ ceykiṉṟāy, eṉ tāmaraik kaṇṇā?
eṉṉum; kaṇṇīr malka irukkum;
eṉ ceykēṉ, eṟi nīrt tiruvaraṅkattāy?
eṉṉum; vevvuyirttu uyirttu urukum;
muṉ ceyta viṇaiyē! mukappaṭāy eṉṉum;
mukilvaṇṇā! takuvaṭō? eṉṉum—
muṉ ceytu iv ulakam uṇṭu, umiḻntu, aḷantāy!
eṉkolō muṭikiṉṟatu ivaṭkē? (VII–2–2)

Translation

" My lotus-eyed Lord, unto me what will you do? "
Is the question by this lady put, her eyes filled with tears,
She stands still and queries again, ' What shall I do
To get at you, oh, Lord of Tiruvaraṅkam with surging waters?'
Says she, panting and breathing hot, ' Come before me, my past sins,",
' Oh cloud-hued Lord! is this all your mercy?', unto this girl tense,

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Say what will happen, Oh, Lord, Who the worlds did create,
Ate and spat, spanned and did many such things, them to protect?

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī would like to know what those massive sins committed by her, are, which stand between her and the Lord. That only shows, she is painfully conscious of the fact that she has to face the consequences of her past sins, instead of blaming the Lord. But then, the cloud-hued Lord, known for His munificence like the rain-clouds, could, in the exercise of His quality of mercy, wipe off the sins, *in toto*, and in no time.

(ii) Breathing hot, the Nāyakī melts under the impact of that heat as if she isn't there to sigh anymore.

(iii) So great is the heat generated by her separation from the Lord that she would like to be thrown by some one into the cool waters of the river Kāvēri in Śrīraṅgam, the river Tāmraparṇi in her birth place having already become hot because of her desolation.

vaṭku ilaḷ iṟaiyum; maṇivaṇṇā! eṉṉum;
vāṉamē nōkkum; maiyākkum;
uṭku uṭai acuṟar uyir ellām uṇṭa
oruvaṉē! eṉṉum; uḷ urukum;
kaṭkilī! uṉṉaik kāṇumāṟu aruḷāy;
kākuttā! kaṇṇaṉē! eṉṉum—
tiṇ koṭi matiḷ cūḻ tiruvaraṅkattāy!
ivaḷtiṟattu eṉ ceytiṭṭāyē? (VII–2–3)

Translation

Shaking off all reserve, this lady calls out, "Oh, Lord of sapphire hue,"
And at the sky gazes, pining for Him unique, Who slew
The Asuras formidable, thawing down, she prays, "Oh, Lord invisible,
You did incarnate as Kākuttā (Rama) and Kaṇṇaṉ, make yourself visible

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Unto me now"; Oh, Lord, who in Tiruvaraṅkam does recline,
The walled city strong, what's it you have unto this girl done?

Notes

(i) The mother is amazed at the complete lack of the innate modesty on the part of her love-intoxicated daughter, her calling out loudly the name of her spouse and that too, the one indicative of His bewitching Form which she ought to enjoy secretly at heart.

(ii) The Lord, who slew the Asuras and relieved the distress of the Devas, notoriously selfish, should certainly rush to the aid of the weaker sex, particularly those who cling to His feet under all circumstances.

(iii) The upaniṣads state that the Lord will exhibit His exquisite Form and splendour to the subjects of His choice. It is this that emboldens the Nāyakī to call upon Him to appear before her. The Incarnate Forms like Rāma and Kṛṣṇa could, of course, not be seen at all times, they having already gone back to the Celestium. So then, the Āḻvār wants the Lord at Tiruvaraṅkam to appear before him in His iconic Form. Actually, the tough walls of the holy place would seem to extend an invitataion to the devout to come and enjoy the Lord reclining there in His worshippable form all the time, unlike the Lord's incarnations, the irretrievable past.

(iv) The mother wants to know what exactly the Lord had done to bring about this kind of infatuation in her daughter.

iṭṭa kāl, iṭṭa kaiyaḷāy irukkum;
eḻuntu ulāy mayaṅkum; kai kūppum;
kaṭṭamē kātal eṉṟu mūrccikkum;
katalvaṇṇā! kaṭiyaikāṇ eṉṉum;
vaṭṭa vāy nēmi valaṅkaiyā! eṉṉum;
vantitāy eṉṟu eṉṟē mayaṅkum-
ciṭṭaṉē! ceḻu nīrt tiruvaraṅkattāy!
ivaḷtiṟattu eṉ cintittāyē? (VII–2–4)

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Translation

Sometimes this lady is motionless and she moves about, at times,
Insensate she remains but still seen with joined palms,
She swoons, exclaiming, " God-love is indeed hard to endure ";
Says she, " Oh, sea-hued Lord, You are unto me much too severe ",
Calling out many a time, Him that wields the discus round
In His right hand, she faints when He comes not; oh, Lord immaculate,
Reclining in fertile Tiruvaraṅkam, what is it you do for her contemplate?

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī, intoxicated with God-love, exhibits the same behaviour as those struck by Śri Râma's mighty arrows. The targets of those arrows will be severally seen fainting with pain, tortured or running about here and there in great fright. So also, the Nāyakī is at times insensate, sometimes, she moves about here and there agitated, and at other times, feels tortured by the immensity of her God-hunger still remaining unappeased. The Āḻvār, who was hitherto looking upon God-love as an end in itself, now feels it a terrible tormenter, much beyond his capacity to endure.

(ii) The mother's reference to an Immaculate God is rather ironical. She seems to suggest that, after inflicting all this pain on her daughter, He masquerades as the perfect One, like unto a Brahmin going about chanting Vedas, wearing white sacred thread and twisted Kuśâ grass in the fourth finger, the very picture of a perfect Brahmin, after killing several Brahmins.

(iii) *Fertile Tiruvaraṅkam*: The mother chides the Lord whether He came down to that cosy place only to sleep away, unmindful of the precarious condition of her daughter and His duty towards her.

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cintikkum; ticaikkum; tēṟum; kai kūppum;
tiruvaraṅkattuḷḷāy! eṉṉum;
vantikkum; āṅkē maḷaikkaṇ nīr malka,
vantiṭāy eṉṟu eṉṟē mayaṅkum—
antippōtu avuṇaṉ uṭal iṭantāṉē!
alai kaṭal kaṭainta ār amutē!
cantittu uṉ caraṇam cārvatē valitta
taiyalai maiyal ceytāṉē! (VII–2–5)

Translation

Oh, Lord, Avuṇaṉ's body you tore off at twilight,
You are the Nectar insatiable that churned the ocean,
You have the heart of this lady stolen,
With resolve firm to join you and stay at your feet,
Dwindles she in contemplation of her erstwhile union;
Suddenly rallies round and with joined palms and head bent,
She calls out, "Oh, Lord in Tiruvaraṅkam", and tears from her eyes do rain,
"You haven't come, You haven't come", she utters and faints.

Notes

(i) Turning the searchlight inward, the Nāyakī finds that a soul, badly caught up in the vortex of worldly life, with its terrific involvement in a recurring cycle of birth and death, was attracted by the Lord's bewitching eyes, had the blissful union with Him for a while, only to be deserted by Him as at present. Contemplating thus, she breaks down and even then, her palms are joined in reverence, a unique feature of hers, under all circumstances.

(ii) Despite the Lord having taken up His abode in Tiruvaraṅkam, in His worshippable (Iconic) Form, it is indeed distressing that He hasn't obliged the Āḻvār with His presence. Did He not assume the Form of Narasinga and keep Himself ready for emergence at the precise moment, where and when His presence would be demanded, all for the sake of the young lad, Prahlāda, son of Avuṇaṉ (Hiraṇya)?

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(iii) *Stealing the heart of this lady*: It was just because a mere crow inflicted a slight injury son the person of His beloved consort, Śrī Rāma sent 'Brahmāstra', a super-missile, in hot pursuit of the little creature, literarally applying heroic remedies for petty maladies. Even so, He took great pains to enthral a petty soul like the Āḻvār's and the latter gave away her heart unto Him, in sweet contemplation of this great gesture on His part.

(iv) The three successive stages of love to God, indicated in this song, are worth noting. These are *Recollection*, *Trance* and *Rallying—recollection* of all the past ravishments vouchsafed by the benign Lord, trance, fainting in desolation caused by such recollection in the light of the present state of non-enjoyment and *rallying*, that is, the sudden lucidity while in the trance state considered to be very dangerous indeed. The momentary lucidity in a delirious state, is akin to the sudden lighting up of consciousness in a person under the spell of death-coma or the sudden flicker of the dying light. That was the reason why Nañciyar exclaimed, with great fright, when Uyntapiḻḻai, cīyar's disciple, recited this song, "Woe unto her (Saint's) lucidity! I am undone".

maiyal ceytu eṉṉai maṉam kavarntāṉē!
eṉṉum; mā māyaṉē eṉṉum-
ceyya vāy maṇiyē! eṉṉum; taṉ puṉal cūḻ
tiruvaraṅkattuḷḷāy! eṉṉum;
veyya vāḷ, taṇṭu, caṉku, cakkaram, vil
eṉtum viṇṇōr mutal! eṉṉum;-
pai koḷ pāmpu aṇaiyāy! ivaḷtiṟa*tu aruḷāy-
pāviyēṉ ceyarpālatuvē. (VII–2–6)

Translation

Please say what this sinner can do unto her daughter,
Who exclaims, "Oh, you that enticed me and stole my heart,"

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" You that worked many wonders huge, ", " Oh, Araṅkaṉ reclining amid cool waters?"
" You of sapphire hue, with lips red, Chief of Celestials, wielding weapons hot, "
And so on, Oh, Lord, reclining on the hooded serpent,

Note

The mother says unto Lord Raṅganāthā;

" My daughter keeps wondering how you stole her heart, by engendering in her enormous love, how, during your union with her, you worked many wonders such as exhibiting your loving condescension of amazing magnitude, how you enthralled her by your exquisite physical charm, your red lips and sapphire hue, how you don't come unto her, although so very near in Tiruvaraṅkam, how your mighty weapons do not cut out her sins, if at all, they do stand between you and her and so on. Should you not be inseparable from my daughter even as you cling to your serpent-bed? How is it you relax yourself on this cosy bed, when my daughter is struggling hard, panting for you, as above? Please say what this sinner (self) witnessing the sad spectacle, can at all do to relieve my daughter's distress".

pāla tuṉpaṅkaḷ iṉpaṅkaḷ paṭaittāy!
paṟṟilār paṟṟa niṉṟāṉē!
kāla cakkarattāy! kaṭal iṭam koṇṭa
kaṭalvaṇṇā! kaṇṇaṉē? eṉṉum;
cēl koḷ taṇ puṉal cūḻ tiruvaraṅkattāy!
eṉṉum; eṉ tīrttaṉē eṉṉum;
kōla mā maḷaikkaṇ paṉi malka irukkum-
eṉṉuṭaik kōmaḷak koḻuntē. (VII–2–7)

Translation

Says my tender darling, her eyes, cool and lovely, filled with tears,
" Oh, Distributor of weal and woe among your creatures,
Even unto those who seek not refuge in you, you are the Protector,

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Oh, Controller of the wheel of Time. the Milk-ocean is your abode.
Oh, sea-hued Lord. Oh, Kaṇṇā, You that in Tiruvaraṅkam do reside,
Amid cool waters full of fish, You, my Sanctifier, and so on.

Notes

The Nāyakī's address, as above, quoted by the Mother, when analysed, would reveal her trend of thought as follows:

(i) My Lord, You are known to inflict miseries on the ungodly and regale the devout. Perhaps, you have excluded me from the scope of such a dispensation.

(ii) My Lord, You carry the credential that you extend protection even to those who do not submit themselves as such to your protection (Aśaraṇya Śaraṇyaḥ) and yet, you torment me like this. Paradoxically, a prickly plant has been glorified as a grand tree, like unto the wish-yielding tree.

(iii) Oh, Lord, if you mean to say that the propitious time for my succour has not yet arrived, may I point out to you that time is at your beck and call?

(iv) Reference to Lord Raṅganātha, in the midst of cool waters, full of fish, points to the Nāyakī's incapacity to stay apart from Him even as fish can't stay out of water. And yet, can He afford to Keep away from the Nāyakī?

(v) "*You, my Sanctifier*!" The Lord has instilled in the Nāyakī sanctity, by way of endowing her with the firm conviction that He is her sole Saviour, a belief which remains unshaken, even in the most desperate situation.

(vi) *Tender darling* like unto a creeper which can thrive only when it twists round a pole, firm and fixed, like unto the Lord Himself. The mother says, her daughter is shedding tears in plenty, unable to endure her separation from the Lord. Actually, it was on account of His indefatigable efforts that He has been able to induct

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in her such assiduous love for Him and yet, He would not come and see for Himself, the fruits of His labour!

koḷuntu vāṉavarkaṭku! eṉṉum; kuṉṟu ēnti,
kō-nirai kāttavaṉ! eṉṉum;
aḷum; toḷum! āvi aṉala vevvuyirkkum;
añcaṉa vaṇṇaṉē! eṉṉum;
eḷuntu, mēl nōkki, imaippilaḷ irukkum;
eṅṅaṉē nōkkukēṉ? eṉṉum-
ceḷum taṭam puṉal cūḻ tiruvaraṅkattāy!
eṉ ceykēṉ eṉ tirumakaṭkē? (VII–2–8)

Translation

Oh, Lord, reclining in Tiruvaraṅkam amid sacred waters, what shall I do
For my daughter, like unto Tirumakaḷ, ever calling you,
'Oh Chief of Celestials, Oh, Lifter of Mount (Govardhan) and Protector of cows, '?
With joined palms and tearful eyes, breathing hot she calls,
'Oh, dark-hued Lord,' gazing at the sky she would ask
How and where indeed she could for you look.

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī mentions, side by side, the Lord's supremacy and simplicity, so that one need not be scared of the former nor be tempted to underrate Him because of the latter ;

(ii) The mother suggests that the Lord should be inseparably attached to her daughter even as Tirumakaḷ (Mahā-lakṣmi) inheres in His chest always, brooking no separation;

(iii) Not sighting the Lord in the direction she looks up, the Nāyakī would turn behind in the fond hope that He might take her by surpirse, and embrace her from behind.

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eṉ tirumakaḷ cēr mārvaṉē! eṉṉum; eṉṉuṭai āviyē! eṉṉum;
niṉ tiru eyiṟṟāl iṭantu, nī koṇṭa nilamakaḷ kēḷvaṉē! eṉṉum;
aṉṟu uru ēḻum taḻuvi, nī koṇṭa āymakaḷ aṉpaṉē! eṉṉum-
teṉ tiruvaraṅkam kōyilkoṇṭāṉē! teḷikilēṉ muṭivu ivaḷ-taṉakkē.
(VII–2–9)

Translation

Oh, Lord in Teṉtiruvaraṅkam enshrined, 'tisn't unto me clear
What indeed will be the end of this lady's inordinate longing;
Calls she, "Oh, my Soul, bearing on Your chest Tirumakaḷ, my Mother,"
"Oh Spouse of Dame Earth whom You lifted on Your bent tooth long,"
"Oh, dear One unto the shepherd girl whom you once took over,
Slaying the unruly bulls seven with the voice of thunder,"

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī wonders how she could suffer inspite of Tirumakaḷ (Mahālakṣmī), the unfailing Intercessor between the Lord and His subjects being ever present on His winsome chest. The Lord is the soul of all souls and what is more, the Mother is always in conjunction with Him; here then is a grand setting, the soul of our soul, the super-soul being a mighty combination, highly conducive to our well-being. When Nañcīyar spelt out in one breath, without a break, the first line of this song as in the original text, (third line here), so as to yield this meaning, his preceptor, Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, the high Priest of Lord Raṅganātha, was taking food and listening to the marvellous recital by the inspired Saint. Thrilled by this manner of chanting, with the new light thrown on the text, Bhaṭṭārya stopped eating and reclined in the easy chair, wrapt in rapturous meditation.

This way of addressing God is indeed very fascinating. Tradition has it that the famous Anantāḻvān named his daughter as "My Mother, Lakṣmi" (En Tirumakaḷ) Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, reputed to be no less than the son

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of Lord, please consider me as but a part of the bridal outfit of Your consort, Mahālakṣmi, my Mother and also grant that I may love You as the Beloved of my Mother-(Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷa or Lovely Spouse)".

(ii) The Lord can be dear to Mother Earth only if He could take care of her favourities like the Nāyaki.

(iii) "Having slain the seven unruly bulls with thunderous voice, for winning the hand of Goddess Nīḷā, incarnated as Nappiṉṉai, the shepherdess, Oh, Lord, you are now relaxing in Tiruvaraṅkam on your serpent-bed. How indeed do you intend to put an end to my daughter's afflictions?", asks the gnostic mother of Parāṅkuśa Nāyaki.

muṭivu ivaḷ-taṉakku oṉṟu aṟikilēṉ eṉṉum;
mūvulaku āḷiyē! eṉṉum;
kaṭi kamaḷ koṉṟaic caṭaiyaṉē! eṉṉum;
nāṉmukak kaṭavuḷē! eṉṉum;
vaṭivu uṭai vāṉōr talaivaṉē! eṉṉum;
vaṉ tiruvaraṅkaṉē! eṉṉum;
aṭi aṭaiyātāḷ pōl ivaḷ aṉuki,
aṭaintaṉaḷ-mukilvaṉṉaṉ aṭiyē. (VII–2–10)

Translation

It seemed this lady panting for the Lord wouldn't attain Him,
'I know not the end of my sufferings at all', she did exclaim,
"Oh, Supreme Master of the three worlds,", "Oh Internal Controller
Of Śiva wearing on matted locks fragrant flowers
And Brahmā, the four-headed," "Oh, Chief of Celestials of like form,",
"Oh, generous Tiruvaraṅka," and so on, but now has she attained
The lovely feet of the cloud-hued Lord indeed!

Notes

(i) The mother is mighty glad that her daughter, who was in a hopelessly desperate condition with no prospect

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of an early end to her sufferings, has, after all, attained the feet of Lord Raṅganātha Who is graciously reclining in Tiruvaraṅkam so as to be worshipped by all down below desirous of beholding and enjoying His exquisite Form, instead of being the close preserve of the denizens in Heaven.

(ii) The Celestials in Heaven are endowed with a form like unto the Lord's own and what is more, the continual stream of joy flowing unto them from the Lord who is an inexhaustible fountain of bliss, is reflected on their person enhancing their charm, ever more.

mukilvaṇṇaṇ aṭiyai aṭaintu, aruḷ cūṭi
uyntavaṇ, moy puṉal porunal
tukil vaṇṇat tū nīrc cērppaṇ, vaṇ poḻil cūḻ
vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṇ
mukilvaṇṇaṇ aṭimēl coṉṉa col-mālai
āyirattu ip pattum vallār
mukil vaṇṇa vāṉattu imaiyavar cūḻa,
iruppar-pēriṉpa veḷḷattē. (VII–2–11)

Translation

Those that are well-versed in these songs ten,
Out of the choice thousand, composed in adoration
Of (Lord Raṅganātha) the cloud-hued Lord, by Caṭakōpaṇ
Of fertile Kurukūr on the bank of Porunal, the river sacred,
Who the cloud-hued Lord attained and was by His grace salved,
Will be by Celestials surrounded in High Heaven
And immersed in eternal joy remain.

Note

It is quite clear from this song that the entire hymnal, comprising a thousand songs, is in adoration of Lord Raṅganātha, enshrined in Tiruvaraṅkam (Śrīraṅgam in Tamilnadu). The invocatory song (serial number 4), cited at the beginning of this hymnal, also highlights this fact. No doubt, particular decads have been dedicated to the Lord enshrined in other

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pilgrim centres as well. This is like portions from the main dedication, doled out like holy food first offered to Lord Raṅganātha being divided out and distributed among the minor deities in the chapels around, as Nampiḷḷai would put it.

Seventh Centum—Third Decad (VII-3)
Veḷḷaic curi caṅkoṭu

Preamble

The bliss of the union of the Nāyaki and Lord Raṅganātha having overflown its continents, the Lord hit upon a method whereby the enjoyment could be stabilised instead of the Nāyaki being swept off by its exuberance. He went to Tentiruppēreyil, near the Āḻvār's birth-place, game-hunting by way of relieving the distress of the people over there from the depredations of wild animals. The Nāyaki herself equipped Him with weapons, went with Him straight to the outer gate and bid Him farewell, wishing Him success. The Lord, mounted on Garuḍa, threw a bewitching parting glance at her. But then, she couldn't bear the separation and insisted that she would also go to Tentiruppēreyil to join her Lord, in the face of opposition from her mother, mates and other, kinsmen. The Nāyakī, bent upon going, suggests a via-media namely, if they are against her going alone, they could as well escort her to the place and leave her there with her Lord.

veḷḷaic curi caṅkoṭu āḷi ēnti,
tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉ eṉ neñciṇūṭē
puḷḷaik kaṭākiṉṟa āṟṟaīk kāṇīr;
eṉ collic collukēṉ, aṉṉaimīrkāḷ?
veḷḷac cukam-avaṉ vīṟṟiruntа-
vēta-oliyum, viḷā oliyum,
piḷḷaik kuḻā viḷaiyāṭṭu oliyum
aṟā-tiruppēreyil cērvaṉ nāṉē. (VII–3–1)

Translation

Ye, elders, for Tiruppēreyil I am indeed bound,
Where Vedic chantings, festivals and joyous shouts of children resound

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With no break and the Lord, the very spate of bliss, stays;
How can I express the glorious vision that sways
My mind, the way the lotus- eyed Lord mounts the bird (Garuḍa)
Holding the spiral conch white and the discus in hand,
Which is what You people can't comprehend?

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī says, she can't describe her glorious mental vision adequately. What she has said in this song, touches but a fringe of the subject.

(ii) The undying noise of the children at play, is the unique feature of this pilgrim centre where the children play right in front of the temple. Eager to witness the children at play, the Deity would appear to have asked Garuḍa, installed right in front, to step aside without obstructing His view. Further, the festivals, with their usual fanfare, go on in this centre in an unbroken succession; it is said that Akrūra, the great devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇā, celebrated festivals in quick succession, after he came by the fabulous 'Syamantakamaṇi", a rare gem capable of generating fabulous wealth and here is Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, the gem of a woman and there can be no dearth of festivals, wherever she goes.

nāṉak karuṅ kuḻal tōḻimīrkāḷ!
aṉṉaiyarkāḷ! ayal–cēriyīrkāḷ!
nāṉ it taṉi neñcam kākkamāṭṭēṉ;
eṉ vacam aṉṟu itu; irāppakal pōy,
tēṉ moytta pūmpoḻil taṇ paṇai cūḻ
tēṉ tiruppēreyil viṟṟirunta
vāṉap piṟāṉ, maṇivaṇṇaṉ, kaṇṇaṉ
ceṅkaṇi vāyiṉ tiṟattatuvē. (VII–3–2)

Translation

Ye, mates with dark hair aromatic, ye, elders and neighbours,
Gone out of hand, My mind, I can't control; day and night,
Ahead of me it goes and lurks in the lips, like unto red fruit,

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Of Kaṇṇaṉ, the heavenly Lord of sapphire hue, Who stays
In Teṉtiruppēreyil with lands fertile and flower gardens full
of honey bees.

Notes

(i) The apparent incongruity of the mates appearing before the disconsolate Nāyaki with their hair nicely tended and perfumed, is reconciled by Nampiḷḷai, as follows:—

When the Nāyaki was in communion with the Lord, the flowers worn and discarded by Him would be picked up by the mates and worn by them even if they be mere shreds. The perfume therefrom is everlasting and it serves to sustain the Nāyaki, when the Lord is not beside her, as at present.

Alternately, it could be that the mates, bent upon rallying the Nāyaki round, should not themselves present a picture of dejection, with dishevelled hair. This is like Lakṣmaṇa having kept himself fit for serving Rāma, although the former's grief was by-no-means less than that of the latter over the abduction of Sītā.

(ii) The worldlings cannot be weaned away from sensual pleasures even as the Nāyaki cannot be weaned away from God-head. The God-bent mind of the Nāyaki has taken a leap ahead of her and got absorbed in Him completely. There is, therefore, no question of her being brought round by any one, not even the concerted action of the mates, mother and neighbours. Instead of the mind being subordinate to her, it is now the other way round. In short, the Nāyaki, enthralled by the Lord at Tiruppēreyil, is beyond recovery, from the point of view of the worldlings to whom she is lost altogether.

ceṇkaṇi vāyiṉ tiṟattatāyum,
ceṅ cuṭar nīḷ muṭi taḻntatāyum,
caṅkoṭu cakkaram kaṇṭu ukantum,
tāmaraik kaṇkaḷukku aṟut tīrntum,

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tiṅkaḷum nāḷum viḷā aṟāta
teṉ tiruppēreyil vīṟṟirunta
naṅkaḷ pirāṉukku eṉ neñcam-tōḷī!
nāṉum niṟaiyum iḻantatuvē. (VII–3–3)

Translation

Come, ye, mate, enthralled by the Lord's fruit-like lips red,
Enamoured of His tall resplendent crown, glowing red,
Enticed by His conch and discus and by His lotus eyes enslaved
My mind has unto the Lord, in Teṉtiruppēreyil enshrined,
With its fanfare of festivals unbroken, lost its reserve and refinement.

Notes

(i) The elders and neighbours having retreated from the scene, giving up the task of reclaiming the Nāyakī as hopeless, only the mate stays on, for further counselling. When she points out how unbecoming of the feminine rank and position the conduct of the Nāyakī is, the latter indicates in this song what indeed brought her to this pass. Actually, the Nāyakī's mind is getting exclusively absorbed in each one of these features of the Lord, even as He pervades all things, *in toto*, inside out. It is worth recalling, in this context the anecdote of Śaubhari. Great indeed was the spiritual prowess of sage Śoubhari. One day he went to a pond and noticed the fish playing about, huddled together. This fascinated the mind of the sage, steeped in renunciation till then, to lead a married life and rear up a large family, as in the fish pond. Learning that king Māndhāthā had fifty charming princesses, all unmarried, the sage asked the king to give him one of his daughters in marriage. The King evaded the issue by asking the sage to propose to the Princesses directly so that whosoever liked him could be taken as his bride. The sage knew the trick of the King quite well and, therefore, transformed himself into a charming young man whom the Princesses vied with one another to marry. The powerful sage took on fifty forms, on

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account of his great tapasya, and married all of them. Similar is the intensity of the Āḻvār's longing to enjoy the Lord, in minute details, assuming different forms.

(ii) The Lord is enshrined in His Iconic (Worshippable) Form for the sake of us, the bound souls lingering in this world, even as His transcendent Form in Heaven is for the enjoyment of the 'Nityas' (Eternal heroes) and 'Muktas' (Released Souls) there, the 'Vyūha' (Operative Form) in the Milky ocean is for those akin to 'Muktas' and the Incarnate Forms are for the fortunate ones, who existed in those good olden times. This being the case, how could the Nāyakī keep away from the Lord in His 'Arca' (iconic) form at Tiruppēreyil?

iḷanta em māmaittiṟattup pōṉa eṉ neñciṉārum aṅkē oḷintār;
uḷantu iṉi, yaraikkoṇṭu eṉ, uṟākō?-ōtak kaṭal oli pōla, eṅkum
eḻunta nal vētattu oli niṉṟu, ōṅku teṉ tiruppēreyil vīṟṟirunta
muḻaṅku caṅkak kaiyaṉ māyattu āḻntēṉ-
aṉṉaiyarkāḷ! eṉṉai eṉ muṉintē? (VII–3–4)

Translation

Ye, elders, that doyen, my mind, sallied forth to get me back
The lustre lost but there itself got badly stuck;
My mind, thus lost, who shall hence my companion be
And what shall I speak ? can you indeed be angry with me,
Seeing me immersed in the wondrous Lord Who wields
The resounding conch and stays in Teṉtiruppēreyil, the standing seat
Of Nalvētam, reverberating all over like the roaring sea?

Notes

(i) The mind is accorded an exalted position by the Nāyakī and referred to, with great respect, by reasons of its being God-bent and competitive in its exuberance for God-enjoyment. Discoloration set in because of the Nāyakī's extreme dejection, in her state of separation from the Lord. In a bold bid to restore to the Nāyakī her lost lustre, the mind went up to the Lord but alas!

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it got stuck up at that end, completely absorbed in Him. The Nāyakī can hardly find any company other than her own mind for giving her the much-needed solace and, she feels worse off than Sītā in captivity, where she had atleast Tṛjaḍā and Saramai to console her. The Nāyakī is worse off than Sītā, in the sense that the former cannot court the company of anyone, neither the sense-buried Earthlings nor the egotistic tin-gods of the upper worlds, nor the Nityas, totallya bsorbed in God-enjoyment in the yonder heaven and least of all, the One who keeps aloof, having robbed her of her very garment.

(ii) She herself is now caught up in the compelling charm of the Lord at Teṇtiruppēreyil and she keeps musing over the Lord's fascinating features, all the time.

(iii) This pilgrim centre is said to be resonant with the sweet. chanting of Nalvētam (Sāmaveda)

muṉintu cakaṭam utaittu, māyap-
pēy-mulai uṇṭu, marutu iṭai pōy,
kaṉinta viḷavukkuk kaṉṟu eṟinta
kaṇṇa-pirāṉukku eṉ peṇmai tōṟṟēṉ-
muṉintu iṉi eṉ ceytīr, aṇṇaimīrkāḷ?
muṉṉi avaṉ vantu vīṟṟirunta
kaṉinta poḻil tiruppēreyiṟkē,
kālampeṟa, eṇṇaik kāṭṭumiṉē. (VII–3–5)

Translation

Ye, elders, what would you gain by rebuking me? lost is my feminity
Unto Kaṇṇaṇ, who the demon in the cart-wheel kicked in fury,
Sucked unto death the devil's breast and crawled 'twixt the twin trees,
Smote a calf against the wood-apple right on the tree
And slew both the demons; take me, with no more delay,
To Tiruppēreyil, full of gardens nice where my Lord stays.

Note

The Nāyakī is lost unto Kaṇṇaṇ (Lord Kṛṣṇa), in the sense that the bonds of feminine reserve and refinement have burst

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in the face of her overwhelming, rather overpowering God-love. She advises the elders not to attempt the senseless task of putting up the bund after all the water has escaped down the sluices but to take her to Tiruppēreyil and leave her there where the Lord has come, in advance, to reclaim her. This they should do quickly when she is still alive, seeing her precarious condition.

kālam peṟa eṉṉaik kāṭṭumiṉkaḷ-
kātal kaṭaliṉ mikap peritāl:
nīla mukil vaṇṇattu em perumāṉ
niṟkum muṉṉē vantu; eṉ kaikkum eytāṉ;
ñālattu avaṉ vantu vīṟṟiruntaṉ-
ṉāṉmaṟaiyāḷarum vēḷvi ōvā,
kōlac cenneṟkaḷ kavari vīcum,
kūṭu puṉal-tiruppēreyiṟkē. (VII–3–6)

Translation

Ye, elders, it seems the cloud-hued Lord is in front of me
And yet beyond my reach; alas! my love is bigger than the sea,
Better take me quick to Tiruppēreyil, the place on Earth
Where the Lord has come to stay, full of mirth,
With water in plenty and paddy crops lovely, the centre great
Where vedic scholars zealously perform sacred rites.

Notes

(i) The elders point out that the Lord had just left on a hunting expedition with her consent and that the Nāyaki should not be so very impatient and that too, so soon. But then the Nāyaki's consuming passion is such that she can't brook separation from her Lord even for a short while. Her love is even more expansive than the ocean. That it is fast gathering momentum can be seen from the fact that her God-love, as set out in V-3-4, was of the size of the ocean and now it has grown bigger than the ocean. A little later, that is, in the eighth song of this decad itself, we find it surpassing the Earth, the seven peripheral oceans and the ultramundane regions, far beyond as well. In X-10-10,

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it swells up to such astounding dimensions as to encompass the Supreme Lord Himself, the very object of love.

(ii) How could the Nāyakī contain the on-rush of God-love with such rapid strides, and keep it under restraint, as advised by the elders, the more so, when the glorious vision of the blue-hued Lord is right in front, and yet baffles external perception and sensibility? The only way this love could be nurtured is to take her to Tiruppēreyil, where the Lord is in His worshippable form, in all His heavenly splendour, surrounded by profound Vedic scholars, fertile fields and lovely gardens. Even as the paddy crops are sustained by the standing columns of water, the entire landscape of that holy centre sustains the Nāyakī.

pēr eyil cūḻ kaṭal teṉ ilaṅkai ceṟṟa pirāṉ vantu vīṟṟirunta
pēreyiṟkē pukku, eṉ neñcam nāti, pērttu vara eṅkum kāṇamāṭṭ
ārai iṉi iṅku uṭaiyam tōḻī? eṉ neñcam kūva vallārum illai; [ēṉ;
ārai iṉikkoṇṭu eṉ cātikkiṉṟatu? eṉ neñcam kaṇṭatuvē kaṇṭēṉē.
(VII–3–7)

Translation

My mind that went in quest of the Lord, who burnt down
Laṅkā, across the sea, surrounded by walls gigantic,
And now stays in Tiruppēreyil, hasn't come back;
Nobody else can keep me company nor is there any one
To restore my mind unto me; here's none who can perchance
Do unto me a good turn and my mind I shall follow hence.

Notes

(i) "Having seen in Tiruppēreyil, the victorious Lord who vanquished that felon, Rāvaṇa", says the Nāyakī unto the mate, "it is no wonder, my mind doesn't come back to me. Having lost such a great companion, there is hardly any point in my staying behind, as there is none who can take his place. Even you are in a state of extreme debility. It is, therefore, but meet that I follow suit and join my mind right where it has gone". Did

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not Śrī Rāma say, in Uttara Rāmāyaṇa, when he set out for the Celestium after His long stay in this abode, that He was going the way Lakṣmaṇa had gone a little earlier? Lakṣmaṇa was the first to go and Śrī Rāma went a little later.

Śrī Nampiḷḷai would say that Hanumān visited even the inpenetrable Laṅkā, remote and inaccessible, from where none could return safely and came back with a message from Sītā but the Nāyakī's mind could not get back from near-by Tiruppēreyil. And now, instead of sending a message to God, she has to send one to her mind. There is none to carry the message either. There is thus no remedy except her going there herself.

(ii) The Lord in Tiruppēreyil is said to be fresh from His victory over Rāvaṇa. But then, that was the time when Śrī Rāma's mind was vitiated by feelings of suspicion and anger, leading to His acrimonious address to Sītā, in such harsh terms as:

> " My love is fled, for on thy fame
> Lies the dark blot of sin and shame;
> And thou art hateful as the light
> That flashes in the injured sight ".

Śrī Āḷavandār (Saint Yāmunācārya), the great preceptor, was greatly piqued by this unreasonable accusation of the Mother and he said: " Surely, it isn't my radiant Mother's light that hurts but Rāma's sore eye that is hurt. The mote is indeed in Rāma's eye; Sītā is absolutely pure, bright like the pure flame that appears tainted owing to dark suspicion obscuring Rāma's heart ".

kaṇṭatuvē koṇṭu ellārum kūṭi,
kārk kaṭal vaṇṇaṇōṭu eṇṭiṟattuk
koṇṭu, alar tūṟṟiṟṟu; atu mutalāk
koṇṭa eṉ kātal uraikkil, tōḻī!

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maṇ tiṇi ñālamum, ēḻ kaṭalum,
nīḷ vicumpum kaḻiyap peritāl;
teṇ tirai cūḻntu avaṇ vīṟṟirunta
teṇ tiruppēreyil cērvaṇ-ceṉṟē. (VII–3–8)

Translation

My mate, ever since the elders began to complain,
Seeing the outer change in me, about my union
With the Lord of oceanic hue, my love unto Him has swollen
Beyond the Earth, its peripheral oceans seven
And the ultra mundane regions afar; so then,
My Lord at Tiruppēreyil I have to go and join.

Note

The people around could hardly know the depth of the God-love swelling up the Nāyaki's bosom but they could, in a way, notice it from the words she uttered, her lamentation and other external changes in her complexion, behaviour etc. Then, they started rebuking her but their remonstration produced the opposite effect, virtually serving as the rich manure for the speedy cultivation of her God-love. And now, it has grown to the astounding dimensions, set out in this song (See also the notes under V-3-4), VII-3-6 and X-10-10).

cērvaṇ ceṉṟu-eṉṉuṭait tōḻīmīrkāḷ!
aṉṉaiyarkāḷ! eṉṉait tēṟṟa vēṇṭā;
nīrkaḷ uraikkiṉṟatu eṉ itaṟku?
neñcum niṟaivum eṉakku iṅku illai;
kārvaṇṇaṇ kārk kaṭal ñālam uṇṭa
kaṇṇa-pirāṉ vantu vīṟṟirunta-
ēr vaḻa oṇ kaḻaṇip paḻaṇa-
teṇ tiruppēreyil mānakarē. (VII–3–9)

Translation

Ye, mates and elders, make no attempt to reclaim me,
There's hardly anything you can say, gone is my mind
And my modesty too, and now for Tiruppēreyil am I bound,

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With its fields fertile, fed with water in plenty,
Where resides Kaṇṇaṉ, my Lord of blue tint,
Who the Sea-bound worlds did gulp.

Note

The Nāyakī insists upon going to Tiruppēreyil, as the mates and elders counselled her patience and infused in her hopes of an early return of her Beloved Lord. The Nāyakī is, however, in no mood to listen to such hollow inducements. As a matter of fact, stripped of her mind, which has preceded her in its flight to the Lord, she can hardly be receptive to all that they say. At any rate, she did not have that type of mind, that would respond to their advice. Further, she stands enthralled by the exquisite charm of the blue-hued Lord, the great Redeemer.

nakaramum, nāṭum, piṟavum tērvēṉ;
nāṉ eṉakku illai, eṉ tōḻimīrkāḷ!
cikara maṇi neṭu māṭam nīṭu
teṉ tiruppēreyil vīṟṟiruṇta
makara neṭuṅkuḻaik kātaṉ, māyaṉ,
nūṟṟuvarai aṉṟu maṅka nūṟṟa
nikar il mukilvaṇṇaṉ, nēmiyāṉ, eṉ
neñcam kavarntu eṉai ūḻiyāṉē? (VII–3–10)

Translation

My mates, I am not in the least shy to go forward
To cities and villages in quest of those that look down
Upon my love unto Makaraneṭuṅkuḻaikkātaṉ, the peerless Lord, cloud-hued,
With discus in hand, of wondrous deeds, who got slain
The hundred Kaurav brothers and now resides in Tiruppēreyil,
The ancient city with its turrets tall and stately castles,
Who since ages long did my heart steal.

Notes

(i) The mates pointed out that the Nāyakī would, by darting forth in the manner repeatedly proposed by her, only

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invite public ridicule and criticism of her conduct. The Nāyakī, however, retorts that she would go forward in search of these very persons, in hall and hamlet, as it would indeed gladden her heart to be told about her union with Lord, Makarabhūṣaṇa (whose ears are bedecked with pearls), especially in her present state of separation from Him.

(ii) Even as the Lord manoeuvred, by stages, to get the hundred Kaurava brothers slain, He seems to have planned long, long back to steal away the Nāyakī's heart.

ūḻitōṟu ūḻi, uruvum pērum
ceykaiyum vēṟavaṉ, vaiyam kākkum
āḻi nīr vaṇṇaṉai, accutaṉai,
aṇi kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ conṉa
kēḷ il antāti ōr āyirattuḷ
ivai tiruppēreyil mēya pattum
āḻi aṅkaiyaṉai ētta vallār
avar aṭimaittiṟattu āḻiyārē. (VII–3–11)

Translation

Those that adore the Lord, with conch and discus fine,
By chanting this decad which unto the Deity at Tiruppēreyil pertains,
Out of the thousand peerless songs composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of lovely Kurukūr, extolling Accutan, the sea-hued Lord, Who takes on
Different names and forms in different ages, to carry on
His steadfast work of universal protection,
Will in His eternal service be blessed to remain.

Note

The end-stanza brings out that those well-versed in these ten songs, will be blessed with the great good fortune of rendering eternal service unto the Lord, like unto His discus, ever alert and dutiful.

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Seventh Centum—Fourth Decad (VII-4)
(Āli eḷa)

Preamble

Just when the Nāyaki was attempting to go to Tiruppēreyil where the Lord had gone for game-hunting, He returned victorious, like Śrī Rāma back home from exile, after vanquishing Rāvaṇa and his formidable horde of Rākṣasas. It may be recalled that Sītā locked Śrī Rāma in her sweet embrace by way of nursing wounds on His person after His remarkable victory over Kara, Dhūṣaṇa, Tṛśiras and the fourteen thousand Rākṣasas under them, singlehanded and in an amazingly short space of time. Even so, Parāṅkuśa Nāyaki, exceedingly jubilant over the Lord's quick return from His victorious hunting expedition, gets locked up in His sweet embrace, by way of relieving His fatigue. In her festive mood, she also goes on recounting the Lord's wondrous deeds and benefaction, vast and varied, as set out in this decad, exclaiming, " What a marvel !" "what a wonder!" and so on.

(Āṟāyirappaṭi Commentary)

āḻi eḷa, caṅkum villum eḷa, ticai
vāḻi eḷa, taṇṭum vāḷum eḷa, aṇṭam
mōḷai eḷa, muṭi pātam eḷa, appaṇ-
ūli eḷa-ulakam koṇṭavāṟē! (VII–4–1)

Translation

Oh, how wonderful! the way the Benefactor great spanned the worlds,
The discus, first to grow tall like unto the Lord,
Was by the conch, bow, mace and sword followed;
Benedictory shouts from all directions went up,
The massive globe got pierced and bubbling came up
Peripheral waters, the Lord's crown and feet moving up,
And for Devas, the good days showed themselves up.

Note

The breath-taking expansion of the Lord as Tṛvikrama, spanning the entire Universe, up and below, is mentioned first. When the King embarks on a mighty undertaking,

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his immediate attendants vie with each other in exhibiting their eagerness to ensure its successful achievement. When Rāma set out on exile, Lakṣmaṇa was the first to step forward to accompany Him. Likewise, when the Lord started expanding upward, His discus, the principal weapon, was the first to expand, the other weapons following suit. In Śrī Nampiḷḷai's unique way of putting things, the discus coolly stuck to the Lord's hand so that when the Lord rose high up, it could automatically go up; actually, the amazing rapidity with which the Lord rose up made the discus sceptical of keeping pace with the Lord through its own effort and hence this device. The luminous discus shone with extra brilliance while the conch bellowed forth, striking terror in the hearts of the ungodly. The discus has always had a dominant role to play in all the Avatāras of the Lord. During His advent as Rāma, the aura of the discus permeated the bow, the same aura charged itself into the bent tooth, long and protruding, of the great Boar (varāha), into Narasimha's nails and Paraśu Rāma's axe. It was the discus that spoilt the eye of Śukrācārya, the high priest of the Asuras, assuming the shape of the twisted grass in Vāmana's finger. Ever sharp, the alert discus would dart forth from the Lord's hand and instantly hit the target, the Lord wishes to attack, the moment He thinks of it. (śudarśana śatakam)

In this marvellous expansion, the Lord's crown and feet seemed to rise together. With the ascent of the Lord and His appendages, in this manner, the good days were also coming up for the down-trodden Devas. The entire scene is presented by the Āḻvār, as if it was a contemporaneous event televised.

āṟu malaikku etirntu ōṭum oli, aravu
ūṟu culāy malai tēykkum oli, kaṭal
māṟu cuḻaṉṟu aḻaikkiṉṟa oli-appaṇ
cāṟupaṭa, amutam koṇṭa nāṉṟē! (VII–4–2)

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Translation

During the festive days when the great Sire for Devas gave
The nectar from the ocean churned, the great noise came
Of rivers bound for the ocean running back to the mountains,
Of the mighty snake rustling round the gigantic mountain
And of the oceanic water whirling round and round.

Note

When the momentous churning of the Milk-ocean took place, so great was the upheaval of the ocean that the rivers bound for the ocean were repulsed so fast that they had to swirl back to the mountains whence they sprang. And then, there was the mighty serpent, Vāsuki functioning as the rope churning the great mountain, making all the noise that the tremendous friction could produce; and to cap it all was the roaring of the oceanic water whirling with great momentum. What an astounding scene indeed! It is even more astonishing that the Āḻvār could visualise it in such graphic details at this distance of time. As already mentioned elsewhere, the Lord assumed multifarious roles in this breath-taking project.

nāṉṟila ēḻ maṉṉum tāṉattavē; piṉṉum,
nāṉṟila ēḻ malai tāṉattavē; piṉṉum,
nāṉṟila ēḻ kaṭal tāṉattavē- appaṉ
ūṉṟi, iṭantu, eyiṟṟil koṇṭa nāḻē. (VII–4–3)

Translation

Oh, what a wonder! when the Lord pulled the Earth out
With His tooth unique from under the waters deep,
The islands seven didn't from erstwhile positions slip,
The mountains seven were as they had been and didn't tilt,
And again, the oceans seven didn't burst and were *in tact*.

Note

The Lord incarnated as the Great Boar, slew the demon Hiranyākṣa (the golden-eyed) ,in a pitched battle, and forked the Earth, hidden by him under the waters, with His unique tooth, long and portruding. When the Lord put

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the Earth back in position, all its contents, namely, the seven islands, the seven mountains and seven oceans were quite *in tact*, without undergoing any change whatever. This is indeed characteristic of the Omnipotent Lord. The inhabitants also continued to jog on as before, running after food and raiment, unmindful of the herculean tasks performed by the Lord. This is yet another wonder indeed!

nāḻum eḻa, nilam nīrum eḻa, viṇṇum
kōḻum eḻa, eri kāḻum eḻa, malai
tāḻum eḻa, cuṭa-ṛ-taṉum eḻa, appaṉ-
ūḻi eḻa ulakam uṇṭa ūṉē! (VII–4–4)

Translation

Oh, how wonderful! the Lord did during deluge sustain
In His stomach which with noise great sucked in
The worlds seven, the sky and the planets tumbling down,
Land and water got uprooted and Time ceased to function,
The wind and fire, the mountains seven,
The stars and other luminaries fell off their position.

Note

This song brings out the extraordinary situation that prevailed at the time of the deluge when all the elements, Sky and Earth, the Sun, Stars and other luminous bodies fell from their respective positions and moved into the Lord's stomach, literally sucked in, to avoid being swept off. When the Sun, the chief indicater of time and its numerous components go. dislodged, Time automatically ceased to function. Here then is a state of terrible impasse but all things are quite safe inside the Lord's stomach. Oh, what a miracle!

ūṉuṭai mallar tatarnta oli, maṉṉar
āṉ uṭ.ic cēṉai naṭuṅkum oli, viṇṇuḷ
ēṉ uṭait tēvar veḻiṛpaṭṭa oli-appaṉ
kāṉutaiṛ pāratam kai aṛai pōḻtē! (VII–4–5)

Translation

When (Kṛṣṇa) my Sire did the armies assemble
For the wondrous battle of Bhārata where did scream and tremble

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Kings and warriors great and wrestlers fat and strong, fell,
Clashing with noise great and the exalted Celestials,
Gathered in outer space, did with great wonder bubble.

Note

On seeing Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Divine Charioteer, ranged on the side of the Pāṇḍavas, Kings and Warriers of great prowess, arrayed opposite, screamed and trembled. The exalted Celestials came in their strength and watched from above, bubbling with reverent admiration, the wondrous battle down below, whose strategy was directed by the Lord at every turn, culminating in the victory of the Pāṇḍavas.

pōḻtu melinta puṉ cekkaril vāṉ, ticai
cūḻum, eḻuntu utirap puṉalā, malai
kīḻtu, piḷanta ciṅkam ottatāl-appaṉ
āḷ tuyar ceytu, acuraraik kollumārē! (VII–4–6)

Translation

Oh, what a wonder! the way the demon (Hiraṇya) was by my Sire slain;
Right at dusk, like a lion standing over a mountain lain
Down below and cleaving it, splashing blood in all directions
And high up in the sky, turning it all crimson.

Note

Oh, what a thrilling spectacle it was, the way Narasimham slew Hiraṇya, like unto one mountain cleaving another lain, down below, blood flooding all over, high and low! Isn't it strange that the blood should flow, in all directions, including the sky, like water flooding low-lying areas?

māṟu niraittu iraikkum caraṅkaḷ iṉa
nūṟu piṇam malaipōl puraḷa, kaṭal
āṟu maṭuttu utirap puṉalā-appaṉ
nīṟupaṭa, ilaṅkai ceṟṟa nērē! (VII–4–7)

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Translation

Hundreds of corpses (of the Rākṣasas) were felled down
Like mountains huge, by noisy arrows darting in succession,
Filling with blood the ocean and thence into the rivers overflown,
This is how the great Sire (Rāma) did Laṅkā burn down.

Note

Oh, what a grand imagery! The blood of the Rākṣasas, rolling down dead in large numbers, fills the ocean and overflows into the rivers pushing the waters back. Lord Rāma's arrows reduced Rāvaṇa's Laṅka to ashes, a veritable grave-yard. The arrows sped in different directions, clashing with each other, roaring like the sea.

nērcari ıtāṉ koṭik kōḷi koṇṭāṉ; piṉṉum
nērcarintāṉ eriyum aṉalōṉ; piṉṉum,
nērcarintāṉ mukkaṇ-mūrtti kaṇṭīr-appaṉ
nērcari vāṇaṉ tiṇtōḷ koṇṭa aṉṟē! (VII–4–8)

Translation

When Kṛṣṇa, my Sire, did chop off the mighty arms
Of the retreating vāṇaṉ the one with peacock banner
Had to give way and so did the one (Agni) that beams,
The triple-eyed (Rudra) too beat a retreat, in like manner.

Note

Kṛṣṇa's encounter with Vāṇaṉ (Bāṇāsura) and his allies has already been set out, in detail, in the notes under III-10-4. Subrahmaṇya, Son of Śiva, is referred to here as the one with peacock banner. Agni, the fire-god, flaunted all his fortynine facets, in vain; he had to cut a sorry figure, like his compatriots, before Lord Kṛṣṇā.

aṉṟu maṇ, nīr, eri, kāl, viṇ malai mutal;
aṉṟu cuṭar iraṇṭu, piṟavum; piṉṉum
aṉṟu maḻai, uyir, tēvum, maṟṟum-appaṉ
aṉṟu mutal ulakam ceytatumē! (VII–4–9)

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Translation

When the Lord first created the worlds,
The elements five, the mountains and other things were ushered,
All at once and so were the Sun, Moon and Stars,
That very moment came up the clouds that shower
Rains and the lives they sustain, all things still and mobile,
And the minor deities, oh, what a marvel!

Note

This song could refer either to the intial creation of the worlds with their diverse contents as one of His great achievements or be treated as a follow-up of the preceding song, dealing with the subjugation of Bāṇāsura by Lord Kṛṣṇa. The Lord's creation became worth its while, only when He subdued Bāṇāsura and quelled his hauteur galore, crop-protection does indeed form an integral part of crop-cultivation.

mēy niṟai kīḻ puka, mā puṟaḷa, cuṉai
vāy niṟai nīr piḷiṟic coriya, iṉa
ā-niṟaipāṭi aṅkē oṭuṅka-appaṉ
tī maḷai kāttu, kuṉṟam eṭuttāṉē (VII–4–10)

Translation

When (Kṛṣṇa) my Sire, held the umbrella of a mountain
And warded off (Iṉdra's) rain of destruction,
The whole of Āyppāṭi, the town fertile, remained under its protection,
The grazing cattle just moved aside and carried on,
The beasts tumbled as the mount was held upside down
And water from tanks, full to the brim, came gushing down.

Note

Here is a short and sweet picture, graphic enough, of Lord Kṛṣṇa's mountain-lifting to protect a whole township and its cattle from the fury of Indra, which visited on them through a heavy down-pour of revengeful rains for a whole week. While the cattle grazed on undisturbed, moving a

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little down on the mountain slopes, the wild animals, caught unawares, tumbled down, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa held Mount Govardan upside down, like holding an umbrella. Again, the tanks on the mountain slopes, full to the brim, got inverted and the waters discharged therefrom came down with roaring noise, like unto rain-fall from numerous belts, the phenomenon of a multiplicity of rains raised in the process of shielding the township from a single rain visited by the irate Indra. How magnanimous indeed of the Lord to have patiently held aloft a mountain for a whole week and spared Indra, a votary of His (unlike the inimical Asuras), despite the wrong done by him!

kuṉṟam eṭutta pirāṉ aṭiyāroṭum
oṉṟi niṉṟa caṭakōpaṉ uraiceyal
naṉṟi puṉainta ōr āyirattuḷ ivai
veṉṟi tarum-pattum mēvik kaṟpārkkē. (VII–4–11)

Translation

Success in many ways will these ten beneficent songs confer
On those that learn them, out of the thousand composed
By Caṭakōpaṉ who did unto the devotees adhere
Of the Benefactor great, Who aloft did mount Govardan hold.

Note

The Āḻvār feels as if he is one of those who took shelter under mount Govardan, when Lord Kṛṣṇa held it aloft. It could also be interpreted as his joining the rank and file of the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, who have sought refuge at the Lord's feet, scared of the worldly life, like unto those in the pastoral village, who took shelter under Govardan. As Nampiḷḷai puts it, the Āḻvār feels drawn towards the Lord's remarkable simplicity in holding aloft Govardan for a whole week and His exquisite charm in that position. And so, he gives vent to his Joy by mentally mingling with those who were then under the Lord's protective umbrella. Surely, the chanters of this decad which sets out, one by one, the Lord's victorious achivements, will be crowned with success in all their undertakings.

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Seventh Centum – Fifth Decad (VII-5)
(Kaṟpār-irama-pirāṉai)

Preamble

The Āḻvār, who revelled in the last decad, recounting some of the Lord's glorious deeds, cites some more achievements of the Lord's glorious deeds, cites some more achievements of the Lord in this decad, much to his own delectation. At the same time, he could not help wondering how the worldlings, whose birthright it is to share this enjoyment, kept aloof and he even felt vexed with them for their callous indifference. What a pity! Oblivious of the huge treasure of gold, buried within inches right in the centre courtyard of their houses, these folks struggle elsewhere with swollen feet in search of fleeting wealth of no consequence.

kaṟpār irāma-pirāṉai allāl, maṟṟum kaṟparō-
puḷ pā mutalā, puḷ eṟumpu āti oṉṟu iṉṟiyē,
ṉal-pāl ayōttiyil vāḻum carācaram muṟṟavum,
nal-pālukku uyttaṉaṉ-nāṉmukaṉār peṟṟa nāṭṭuḷē? (VII--5–1)

Translation

Will those in quest of Knowledge seek to Know any but Irāmapirāṉ
Who did instil love great for Him even in the smallest ant
And tiny grass in Ayōtti, the blessed city (with God-love rampant),
Things still and mobile, with no effort on their part,
Of all the places in this world, created by Nāṉmukaṉ?

Notes

(i) When *Irāmapirāṉ* (Śrī Rāma) went into exile, even inanimate things got choked with grief, the trees withered away, the tanks and rivers boiled up to such an extent that none could go near them. And when He returned to Ayodhyā at the end of His exile, the trees started yielding fruits out of season, the orchards were all in full blossom, betokening the exuberance of their joy over the Lord's home-coming. Such was the great

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spell of love cast upon all things, still and mobile, and all creatures in the blessed Kingdom of Ayodhā, by Lord Rāma! It has to be noted that this God-love of amazing magnitude was generated in them by the Lord's spontaneous grace, without any effort on their part such as pursuing the paths of discipline laid down by the Śastras for cultivationg it. This aspect has been dwelt upon in aphorism 105 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam' with the Author's characteristic profundity. Even trees and animals were spell-bound, when the Lord, during His next Avtār as Kṛṣṇa, produced sweet strains from His magic flute.

(ii) In his 'Dramiḍopaniṣad tātparya Ratnāvali' Śrī Vedānta Deśika, however, interprets this song, as referring to final emancipation of all things and beings in Ayodhya, due solely to Śrī Rāma's voluntary grace. 'Śākethe muktidhānāt". All the other glossators, except the author of the twleve thousand grantha commentary, hold that this song highlights Lord Rāma's extraordinary grace in investing the creatures in Ayodhyā with an abundance of God-love, matching with that of the denizens in the High Heaven. Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā) is the demi-urge nominated by the Supreme Lord for carrying out the function of creation. Even so, in the worlds created by him there was just one place known as Ayodhyā where all creatures, including the tiniest of beings and things like the ants and grass, were soaked exclusively in love for Lord Rāma, instead of being dependent on Brahmā, the ostensible Creator. Among the living creatures, the ant is the smallest and the grass is the tiniest among things, still and immobile. Mention of these two in this song, goes to emphasise that it is not one's spiritual learning and deep erudition that secure the fina lgoal of 'Mokṣa' but the Lord's sweet to spontaneous grace and 'apratiṣedha' or non-resistance the influx of His grace, on the part of the beneficiaries. Of all places within the ambit of creation of that functionary, known as Brahmā, there is just one, called Ayodhyā where all things and beings from the highest

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to the lowest, subsist on God-love a passionate love for Śrī Rāma, in total replacement of the normal source of sustenance, namely, food. And, therefore, can one long to know of any but Lord Rāma who instilled such love out of His sweet, spontaneous grace?

(iii) Among our Pūrvācāryas (Great Preceptors), Kūrattāḻvāṉ felt that the perfections and graces of Godship were complete in His incarnation as Rāma, eclipsing the glories of all the other Avatāras of the Lord. Bhaṭṭārya, the illustrious son of the illustrious father, had also a distinct predilection for Rāmāvatāra, before whom all the other Avatāras paled into insignificance, according to him. One day, he reacted sharply to the observation made by one Ciriāttāṉ that Lord Rāma did not display the virtue of condescension (Saulabhya) to the remarkable extent displayed by Lord Kṛṣṇa by running an errand, on behalf of the Pāṇḍavas like unto a carrier-pigeon. Bhaṭṭārya stoutly defended his own position, saying: "It is not so; Rāma would have certainly been prepared to go as a messenger but there was none to bid him to carry any message".

nāṭṭil piṟantavaṟ nāraṇaṟku āḷ aṉṟi, āvarō—
nāṭṭil piṟantu, paṭātaṇa paṭṭu, maṇicarkkāy,
nāṭṭai naliyum arakkarai nāṭit taṭintiṭṭu,
nāṭṭai aḷittu, uyyac ceytu, naṭantamai kēṭṭumē? (VII–5–2)

Translation

Will those that to the land belong (where reigns supreme
The Lord's glory), be the vassal of any one but (Him) Nāraṇar
Even after knowing how He unto this wicked land came
And suffered miseries untold for the sake of the humans,
Tormented by the Rākṣasas, how He sought and routed them,
Restoring peace and piety in the land and went back to the
Celestium?

Notes

(i) Śrī Rāma stayed in this land for eleven thousand years although He slew Rāvaṇa and vanquished the monstrous

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hordes under him in His thirty-eighth year itself. During this long period, the Kingdom of Ayodhyā became saturated with love for Him and the subjects looked upon Him as their sole sustainer. No wonder, when He went back to the Celestium, He took them all with Him.

(ii) In the text of this song, Rāma is referred to as Nārāyaṇa (Nāraṇaṉ) being an incarnation of the latter. After the overthrow of Rāvaṇa, Brahmā, Rudra and other Celestials assembled in outer space and sang Śrī Rāma's praise in a chorus, when they said 'Bhavān Nārāyaṇo Devaḥ' etc. Brahmā requested Rāma to get back to the Celestium just then, but Rudra referred to by Vālmīki, as "Śaḍartha nayana Śrīmān" pleaded that He should deign to get back to Ayodhyā and restore happiness to His mothers, brothers and the subjects pining for Him and nurture them with His loving grace.

(iii) Wasn't it His condescending love and deep concern for the sorrowing mortals, down below, sunk in deep distress, that made Him come down to this hideous land which is abhorred even by us, mortals bound by Karma, and stay in the mother's womb for full twelve months, a couple of months more than we do? And what more? No human ever suffered like Him, His separation from Sītā, His beloved Consort, like unto the Soul remaining on one side of the ocean and the body, on the other, loss of jaṭāyu, the vulture King, extremely dear unto Him etc., etc., and yet these very men for whom He underwent all the harrowing hardships are so ungrateful as to criticise and find fault with Him at this distance of time. Even the Devas, who would not deign to step on to this loath-smoe soil and receive the libations offered to them by we men and over here, only from a distance, had no compunction while requesting the Lord to come down to Earth and slay Rāvaṇa, King of Laṅkā and rout the city. So very selfish, these Devas are.

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kēṭpārkaḷ kēcavaṉ kīrtti allāl, maṟṟum kēṭparō-
kēṭpār cevi cuṭu kīḷmai vacaivukaḷē vaiyum
cēṇpāl paḷam pakaivaṉ, cicupālaṉ, tiruvaṭi
tāḷ-pāl aṭainta taṉmai aṟivārai aṟintumē? (VII–5–3)

Translation

Will those that yearn to listen to things great
Listen to aught but the glory of Kēcavaṉ from those
That know how He got restored unto His feet
Even Śiśupāla, the age-long enemy inveterate, who railed abuses
On Him, so vile and mean, that even those who longed
To hear Him maligned found them unsavoury and blistering?

Note

What is there to hear but the glory of the magnanimous Lord Kṛṣṇa (Keśava) who salved even the malicious Śiśupāla, His sworn enemy, whose sole occupation it was to vituperate Him in the meanest terms, from those who have already got to know about it? Even while abusing, Śiśupāla chose Lord Kṛṣṇa as his target, keeping Him in view and mentioning His name all the time, though in bad light. The felon did so not only in one birth but in every one of his many births. And what about the intensity of his hatred for the Lord? Even those, who longed to hear the Lord maligned and hired out persons for this job, could not stand the blistering invectives of Śiśupāla. The merciful Lord perhaps took this as yet another form of recital of His names, 'Nāma Saṅkīrtana' and salved the age-long offender! So then, even enmity to God is preferred to friendship with Satan, seeing that Śiśupāla could obtain salvation, although he was a staunch hater of Lord Kṛṣṇa, reciting His holy names by way of malicious indictment, though coming face to face with His bejewelled Person, *the great fortune of a great enemy*! And what to say of the infiniteness of His grace, much beyond the competence of we mortals to conjecture! The Lord's grace is all the more pronounced, seeing that Śiśupāla had, on his part, not even the remotest wish (arthitva) for salvation and it is incredible that he could ever attain it.

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taṉmai aṟipavar tām avaṟku āḷ aṉṟi, āvarō-
paṉmaip paṭar poruḷ ātum il pāḷ neṭum kālattu,
naṉmaip puṉal paṇṇi, nāṉmukaṉaip paṇṇi, taṉṉuḷḷē
toṉmai mayakkiya tōṟṟiya cūḻalkaḷ cintittē? (VII–5–4)

Translation

Will those, that meditate on the grace galore of the Lord,
Become the vassals of any but Him who put back the worlds
In positions, as of old, creating the beneficent water first,
And Brahmā, the four-headed, next, finding all things lost
For a whole eternity, in a state of veritable naught,
When one thing could not from another be told, in His stomach caught?

Note

We can't but belong to the Supreme, Lord, our Sole Master, the first cause of all things, who created the worlds of differences, with their assortments as Dev. s, humans, birds and beasts, plants and things, still and mobile. It was indeed His grace galore that made Him sustain in His stomach all the worlds with their varied contents, without their being swept off, during the Great deluge (Mahāpralaya), a state of virtual non-existece or nothingness, pending the restoration of the old order of things in due course when He put them back in position. Is there any need then to specifically state that we can't but belong to Him, our creator?

cūḻalkaḷ cintikkil, māyaṉ kaḻal aṉṟi, cūḻvarō-
āḻap perum puṉal-taṉṉuḷ aḻuntiya ñālattait
tāḻap paṭāmal, taṉpāl oru kōṭṭiṭait tāṉ koṇṭa
kēḻal tiru uru āyiṟṟuk kēṭṭum, uṇarntumē? (VII–5–5)

Translation

Will those who seek the means to achieve their ends
Lean on aught but the feet of the wondrous Lord,
Having (from sages) heard and pondered how He pulled

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The Earth out from the depth of the water vast,
As the Great Boar, on His tooth unique, well in tact?

Note

Once we get to know the Lord's grace galore and ponder over it, the manner in which He created the worlds and later, preserved them from being swept off by the deep waters of the Deluge, does it not behove us to look upon Him as our Sole Refuge? When He forked the Earth out, effortlessly on His long tusk, bent and protruding, it looked like a blue gem, at one end of the tooth. It was indeed the Lord's extra-ordinary grace that induced Him to assume a Form out of all proportion to the actual needs, like unto a generous host out to feed a bare forty persons, cooking for a hundred.

kēṭṭum uṇarntavar kēcavaṟku āḷ aṉṟi, āvarō-
vāṭṭam ilā vaṇ kai māvali vātikka, vātippuṇṭu,
īṭṭam koḷ tēvarkaḷ ceṉṟu irantārkku iṭar nīkkiya
kōṭṭu aṅkai vāmaṇaṉ āy, ceyta kūttukkaḷ kaṇṭumē?
(VII–5–6)

Translation

The Devās, tormented by Māvali, the donor great with devilish pride filled,
Did the Lord entreat to rid them of their pain extreme;
Wonders He then performed and the donor's pride He quelled,
As Vāmaṇaṉ, with outstretched arms, seeking the queer kind of alms;
Having all these from the great sages heard
And pondered over, how can one submit to any but Kēcavaṉ, my Lord?

Note

If Māvali (Mahābali) was a peerless donor, the Lord too went to him as a peerless Seeker of alms! It was Bali's infliction of unbearable miseries on the Devas, big and small, which made the otherwise discordant team (cutting at each other's throat, one chopping the head of another, like unto the land-lords envious of the greatness of one another) combine together and appeal at the feet of Lord Mahāviṣṇu.

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kaṇṭum, teḷintum kaṟṟār kaṇṇaṟku āḷ aṉṟi, āvarō-
vaṇṭu uṉ malart toṅkal markkaṇṭēyaṉukku vāḻum nāḷ
iṉṭaic caṭaimuṭi īcaṉ uṭaṉkoṇṭu ucāc cella,
koṇṭu aṅku, taṉṉoṭum koṇṭu, uṭaṉ ceṉṟatu uṇarntumē?
(VII–5–7)

Translation

Ican, with matted locks pronounced, led the little lad,
Mārkaṇṭēyaṉ, with lovely garland bedecked, unto the Lord,
Who blessed the youngster with long life and unto His fold
Admitted him; having heard all these by the great sages told,
Will those that ponder over the Lord's grace galore
Adore any but Kaṇṇaṉ, with their vision clear?

Note

In the preceding song, Indra and other Devas who sought refuge in the Lord, were blessed by Him. But that is nothing when compared with His shedding grace on Mārkaṇṭēya, a votary of Śiva. Here then is yet another poof of the Lord's infinite grace. As regards Mārkaṇṭēyā's episode and the relative role of Śiva and Mahāviṣṇu in redeeming that great initial votary of Śiva, see the elaborate notes under IV-10-8.

cella uṇarntavar celvaṉ-taṉ cīr aṉṟi, kaṟparō-
ellai ilāta perum tavattāl pala cey miṟai,
allal amarararaic ceyyum iraṇiyaṉ ākattai,
mallal ari uru āy, ceyta māyam aṟintumē? (VII–5–8)

Translation

Will those with knowledge, full and perfect,
Learn aught but the glory great of the Lord affluent,
Knowing how, as the gigantic Ari , He tore apart
The body of Iraṇiyaṉ, the demon who thro ' penance immense
Acquired enormous strength and did the Devās tease and torment?

Notes

(i) The knowledgeable persons, whose thoughts can reach the farthest lengths, will not stop short of revelling

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in the Supreme Lord's glory, His auspicious traits and wondrous deeds.

(ii) Hiraṇya (Iraṇiyaṉ) was very formidable indeed, armed with many a boon acquired by Him, by dint of the severest penance imaginable. But he paled into insignificance before the mighty Ari (Narasimha) of enormous size like unto the water collected in the hoof-mark of the cow (the shallow depression on the ground caused by the hoof of the animal) vis-a-vis the oceanic waters. Could one's mind be turned away from a Lord shedding such astounding grace on His devotees?

māyam aṟipavar māyavaṟku āḷ aṉṟi, āvarō-
tāyam ceṟum oru nūṟṟuvar mañka, ōr aivarkku āy,
tēcam aṟiya ōr cāratiyāye ceṉṟu, cēṉaiyai
nācam ceytiṭṭu, naṭanta nal vārttai aṟintumē? (VII–5–9)

Translation

Will those well-versed with the wondrous Lord's exploits magnificent
Ever subserve any but Him, so loving and munificent,
Knowing how He became world-famous as the peerless charioteer,
For the sake of the illustrious five to whom He did cater,
Annihilating their hundred coparceners unfriendly and did the armies shatter
And the heartening word that He went to the Celestium thereafter?

Note

Oh, what an amazing simplicity! the Supreme Lord of the entire Universe did the mean job of driving Arjuna's chariot and that too, in public, on the battle field. When, at his sweet will, a superior person condescends to serve a subordinate, it is usually done *in camera*, and not in public. But here is the Divine charioteer, who not only kept Himself open to public gaze in His Incarnate Form as Kṛṣṇa, but even to day stands before us, in His Iconic (worshippable)

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Form as ' Pārtha Sārathi ' (Arjuna's charioteer) at Triplicane (Tiru-allikkēṇi) in Madras, and as Pāṇḍava Dhūta in Tamilnadu (near Madras) and also in Kāñcī (also in Tamil nadu).

vārttai aṟipavar māyavaṟku āḷ aṉṟi, âvarō-
pōrtta piṟappoṭu, nōyoṭu, mūppoṭu, iṟappu ivai
pērttu, perum tuṉpam vēr aṟa nīkki, taṉ tāḷiṇkīḻc
cērttu, avaṉ ceyyum cēmattai eṉṉit teḷivuṟṟē? (VII–5–10)

Translation

Will those that appreciate the wholesome message
Of the Lord's ' Song Celestial ' and with clarity of mind ponder
What unto them the Lord has done, the long list of favours,
Ridding them of the blinding cloak of birth, pestilence, old age
And death, cutting out, (root and branch), the great disaster
(Of getting lost in self-enjoyment) and granting asylum secure
At His very feet, serve aught but the wondrous Sire?

Notes

(i) The quintessence of the Lord's message in Bhagavad Gītā is in the ' Carama Ślokā ' (XVIII-66), that which treats of the final or the ultimate ' Means ', the loving path of surrender unto God, taking Him as the Sole Refuge, the ' Means ' and the ' End ' combined. This song is virtually a commentary of that Ślokā, vide also the closing aphorism (289) of ' Mumukṣuppaṭi ' (Lokācārya's Manual for the seekers of Mokṣa).

(ii) Birth, in the midst of the worldlings with the attendant risk of becoming oblivious of one's essential nature caught up in a mesh like the spider's web, sickness which saps one's energies, the sudden onslaught of old age, like a thunderbolt and the dark hand of death falling on one's shoulders unawares, are disastrous enough. The greatest disaster of all would, however, be emancipation from the above calamities and staying in a disembodied state, lost in self-enjoyment (known as Kaivalya mokṣa) without tasting the bliss of divine service. It is indeed the greatest of all the favours

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showered on us by the Lord to wean us away *in toto* from courting this eternal disaster of 'Kaivalya anubhava' and vouchsafe unto us the blissful service at His lotus feet, in that Eternal Land (Heaven), with absolutely no risk of our slipping back to the old ways, indeed the greatest of all His benefactions before which all the rest shall pale into insignificance.

teḷivurṟu vīvu iṉṟi niṉṟavarkku iṉpak kati ceyyum
teḷivurṟa kaṇṇaṉait teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
teḷivurṟa āyirattuḷ ivai pattum vallār-avar
teḷivurṟa cintaiyar pā maru mūvulakkattuḷḷē. (VII–5–11)

Translation

Those that learn these songs ten
Out of the lucid thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of kurukūr, adoring the Lord, who clarity personified is
And bestows on His devotees, clear and steadfast, final bliss,
Will clarity of mind attain even in this land of dismal distress.

Notes

(i) *The lucid thousand*: Like unto the turbid water in the river becoming clear and limpid in certain areas, the vedas, confused like the gummy substance in the jack fruit sticking to the straw-like stuff covering the fruit, acquire clarity in the hands of Saint Nammāḻvār.

(ii) *The devotees, clear and steadfast*: Devotees with a clear conviction, like that of the Āḻvār, that the Lord is their Sole Refuge, which cannot be shaken. The clarity of knowledge is like that obtained by Arjuna who confessed to his doubts having been dispelled on hearing Lord Kṛṣṇa's teachings. In this context, it is interesting to recall the following conversation between Nañcīyar and his illustrious disciple, Nampiḷḷai:

Nampiḷḷai: "Sire, did Arjuna attain the Lord or not?"

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Naṅcīyar: "It is immaterial whether Arjuna attained God or not and your question is hardly relevant. We have to pin our faith to Gītā as the Lord's teachings without enquiring who are all the beneficiaries, even as the thirsty quench their thirst by drinking nice, cool water at sight, without caring to ascertain the names of those whose thirst has already been quenched by drinking water".

Seventh Centum—Sixth Decad (VII-6)
(Pā maru mūvulakum)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Saint's address to the world is implicit, although the third person has been used throughout, instead of the second. No doubt, the worldlings kept aloof from God because of their exclusive absorption in sensual pleasures, totally shorn of God-love. But then, here is the Āḻvār with an enormous yearning for the Lord, of unimaginable depth and yet, he has not been able to experience the bliss of lasting communion with Him. We have of course seen him ravished by internal joy, during those delirious moments of union with the Lord (mental vision), overflowing its contents and finding expression through hymns adoring Him and extolling His great glory. In the contrary state of desertion by the Lord, he would lament loudly as in this decad, melting the stony hearts of even the ungodly. Śrī Nampiḷḷai puts it that the Āḻvār's lamentations were so loudly vociferous that it looked as if a vast ocean rose on its feet and roared with all its might; surely it cannot but dislodge the Lord from His seat in the high Heaven and compel Him to come down to the Āḻvār and oblige him with His sweet presence.

Ācārya Ammaṅki Ammal would exclaim:

"We can only sing and listen to this decad sung by others. We are, however, least competent to gauge and express, in concrete language, the unfathomable depth of the Āḻvār's languishment, finding utterance in such soul-stirring diction".

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pā maru mūvulakum paṭaitta paṟpanāpā! ō!
pā maru mūvulakum aḷanta paṟpa pātā! ō!
tāmaraik kaṇṇā! ō! taṉiyēṉ taṉi āḷā! ō!
tāmaraik kaiyā! ō! uṉṉai eṉṟukol cēṟvatuvē? (VII–6–1)

Translation

Oh, Paṟpanāpā, Who created the worlds three, vast and varied,
Oh, Lord with lotus feet that spanned the sprawling worlds three,
Oh, Lotus-eyed, You are the Master unique of this soul lonely;
Oh, Lord, with lotus hands, when do I attain Your feet comely?

Notes

(i) Paṟpanāpā (*Padmanābhā*): The Supreme Lord, the Primate, from whose navel sprouted the lotus stalk; from the lotus flower at the upward end of that stalk, emerged Brahmā who gave birth to all the rest. The navel of the Lord thus proclaims Him as the First and Foremost.: The implication of the address in the opening line is: "Oh my Sire, can You who created all things, destroy me? I am on the verge of extinction".

(ii) The worlds created by the Lord were misappropriated by Mahā Bali unto himself and hence the Lord had to wrest them back from him. Thus there is reference to the spanning of the worlds by the Lord as Tṛvikrāma. The Lord set His feet then on all and sundries but now He would deny those very feet to the Āḻvār who pines for them.

(iii) The Āḻvār was enthralled by the Lord's lotus eyes and thenceforward he has been subsisting on them alone. How then can the Lord withdraw from the Āḻvār his very sustenance?

(iv) It was with His lotus hands that Śrī Kṛṣṇa embraced Akrūra and the same hands dealt a mortal blow to Kaṇṭākarṇa. And now, the Āḻvār is not asking the Lord to embrace him as He embraced Akrūra but only wants Him to say when exactly He would lift him unto

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His lotus feet, even as He. as Lord Rāma, assured Bharata about His return to Ayodhyā from exile at the end of fourteen years.

eṉṟukol cērvatu, antō!-araṉ, nāṉmukaṉ ēttum ceyya
niṉ tiruppātattai yāṉ? nilam, nīr, eri, kāl, viṉ, uyir
eṉṟu ivai-tām mutalā, muṟṟum āy, niṉṟa entāy! ō!
kuṉṟu eṭuttu, ā-nirai mēyttu, avai kātta em kūttā! ō!
(VII–6–2)

Translation

As the Soul You stand of land, water and fire,
Air and space, creatures, one and all, oh, Sire,
You tended the cows and held aloft mount (Govardhan)
To save them, oh, pot-dancer great. alas! when shall I attain
Your lovely feet, Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā) and Araṉ (Śiva) adored?

Note

The Āḻvār longs for the Lord's lovely feet, coveted by the exalted Brahmā, the demi-urge, in charge of creation and the eminent Rudra in charge of dissolution. Specially endowed that he is, the Āḻvār can of course conjure up the cosmic vision of the Lord in all things and beings, as their in-dweller but he 'longs for the Lord's holy feet in His specialised Form of exquisite charm.

kātta em kūttā! o! malai ēntik kal-māri-taṉṉai;
pūt taṉ tuḻāy muṭiyāy! puṉai koṉṟai am ceṉcaṭaiyāy!
vāytta eṉ nāṉmukaṉē! vantu eṉ ār uyir nī āṉāl-
ēttu-arum kīrttiyiṉāy! uṉṉai eṅkut talaippeyvaṉe? (VII–6–3)

Translation

Oh, You Dancer great, aloft You held the mountain
And beat off the hail storm, on Your crown is tuḻaci, cool and nice,
Oh, Internal Controller of Śivā and Brahmā! Your glory description defies,
You are my Soul dear, me, you do, on your own, sustain
And Yet I know not where You I shall attain?

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Notes

(i) Indra visited his fury in the shape of a hail storm. raining stones and Lord Kṛṣṇa warded it off by holding mount Govardhan aloft like an umbrella. As Nampiḷḷai puts it in his unique way, the Lord would have lifted the ocean itself instead of the mountain and shielded the subjects, had Indra sent down watery rain instead of the stony one! The Āḻvār now asks whether the Lord will shield only a whole township and that against the fury of the elements instead of a single individual like him. pelted by the rain of sorrow, visited on him by his very existence in this world. Actually, his affliction is much more intense than the combined intensity of the sufferings of a whole township. And yet, the Āḻvār does not want the Lord to lift yet another mountain for his sake but pines only for the sight of the sinewy arms of the Lord, the lifter of Govardhan.

(ii) Says the Āḻvār "Oh, Lord, You are the Soul iunto me, Your body. Where is the question of the body attaining the Soul? As one exclusively dependent on You, I know of no Means but You, to attain you. Does it not follow, therefore, that You have to pick me up?"

eṅkut talaippeyvaṉ nāṉ-eḻil mūvulakum nīyē;
aṅku uyar mukkaṇ-pirāṉ, pirama-perumāṉ-avaṉ nī;
vem katir vaccirak kai intiraṉ mutalāt teyvam nī;-
koṅku alar taṇ am tuḻāy muṭi eṉṉuṭaik kōvalaṉē? (VII–6–4)

Translation

The lovely worlds three You control, oh, Kōvalaṉ, wearing on Your crown,
Tuḻaci, cool and nice, shedding honey; the triple-eyed Śiva and Brahmā, the exalted
Are at Your disposal and so is Indra who the mace powerful wields;
So then, how can I attain You, on my own?

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Note

The Lord having revealed to the Āḻvār, His grand glory, as the great ordainer, maintaining the exalted Brahmā, Śiva and Indra, their respective estates, as the best of all good things and at the same time, His inordinate love for His devotees, it is but meet that the Āḻvār calls upon Him to cut out all his impediments and lift him unto His feet. There is no question of the Āḻvār attaining Him through his own effort. Can a rat-boned weakling be expected to lift a mountain on his back?

eṉṉuṭaik kōvalaṉē! eṉ pollāk karumāṇikkamē!
uṉṉuṭai unti-malar ulakam-avai mūṉṟum parantu,
uṉṉuṭaic cōti veḷḷattu akampāl uṉṉaik kaṇṭu koṇṭiṭṭu,
eṉṉuṭai ār uyirār eṅṅaṉēkol vantu eytuvarē? (VII–6–5)

Translation

Oh, my beloved Kōvalaṉ, sweet unto me like virgin gem,
How shall this cussed soul, (soaked in worldly pleasures, one and all)
Attain You and behold Your resplendent Form,
In the High Heaven, the land aglow, unique and eternal?

Note

The Āḻvār avers that one like him steeped in sensual pleasures cannot attain the Lord of Supreme Splendour in the High Heaven, except through His spontaneous grace. This is obviously his reply to the question supposed to have been posed unto him by the Lord, whether he should not make some effort to attain the end in view.

vantu eytumāṟu aṟiyēṉ-malku nīlac cuṭar taḻaippa,
ceñcuṭarc cōtikaḷ pūttu, oru māṇikkam cērvatu pōl,
antaramēl cempaṭṭōṭu aṭi, unti, kai, mārpu, kaṇ, vāy
ceñcuṭarc cōti viṭa uṟai eṉ tirumārpaṉaiyē? (VII–6–6)

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Translation

I know not how to get at my Lord
Bearing Tiru (Lakṣmī) on the chest and reclining on Serpent bed,
In the Milk-ocean, His body beaming blue that expands,
His feet, navel, hands, chest, eyes and lips glowing red,
Like unto a ruby radiating lovely rays red.

Note

Here again, the Saint repeats that he has no " Means ' other than the Lord reclining in the Milk-ocean like unto a multi-coloured garment spread over the soft, somnolent serpent-bed, and that He should, therefore, admit him unto His fold in the exercise of His voluntary grace.

eṉ tirumārpaṉ-taṉṉai, eṉ malaimakaḷ kūṟaṉ-taṉṉai,
eṉṟum eṉ nāmakaḷai akampāl koṇṭa nāṉmukaṉai,
niṉṟa cacipatiyai, nilam kīṇṭu eyil mūṉṟu eritta,
veṉṟu pulaṉ turanta vicumpu āḷiyai-kāṇēṉō? (VII–6–7)

Translation

Shall I behold Him that bears on His chest, Tiru, my Mother,
The Internal Controller of the Spouses of Malaimakaḷ, Nāmakaḷ
And Cacī, the Redeemer of Earth, who did help Brahmā, conquer
The senses, the destroyer great of the triple citadels?

Note

The Lord got Brahmā and Śiva married to their respective consorts, Malaimakaḷ (Pārvatī) and Nāmakaḷ (Sarasvati) and so also Indra to Saśi as the parent gets the sons, come of age, suitable brides. The Lord is also the Internal Controller of all including these exalted personalities. There are certain things like redemption of the Earth by the Lord Himself, assuming the gigantic form of a Boar and certain others like the destruction of the Tṛpurā (three citadels) and the three demoniac brothers who ruled the citadels, functioning as the Internal Controller of Rudra. Brahmā, the Demiurge had to acquire control over the senses, preparatory to his being entrusted with the task of creation.

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āḻiyaik kāṇ pariyāy, ari kāṇ nariyāy, arakkar
ūḷai iṭṭu aṉṟu ilaṅkai kaṭantu, pilam pukku oḷippa,
mīḷi am puḷḷaik kaṭāy, viṟal māliyaik koṉṟu, piṉṉum
āḷ uyar kuṉṟaṅkaḷ ceytu, aṭarttāṉaiyum kāṇṭum kolō?
(VII–6–8)

Translation

When shall I behold my Lord Who did mount the lovely bird (Garuḍa)
And annihilate the Asuras who from Laṅkā fled and hid
Inside the underworld, like the horse by the Dinosaur scared,
And the fox by the lion, slew the formidable Māli and his hordes
Throwing up the corpses into heaps of mountains tall?

Notes

The incidents, set out in chapters 5 to 8 of Rāmāyaṇa, Uttara Kāṇḍa, are alluded to in this song:

Mālyavān, Māli and Sumāli, the three sons of Śukeśa, a Rākṣasa, acquired enormous strength through terrific penance, settled in Laṅka and raised a huge population giving endless trouble to the Devas. The Devas, who sought the help of Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, were vouchsafed by Him, protection. This enraged the Asuras who invaded the upper worlds, surrounded the Lord who appeared there, mounted on Garuḍa and engaged Him in a pitched battle. When Mali was slain by the Lord, his brothers Mālyavān and Sumāli encountered Him and were also beaten off. The two Asura chiefs then retreated, along with the remaining followers, into the Pāthāla (underworld) and hid themselves there. Sumāli's daughter, named, Kaikaśi gave birth to Rāvaṇa and others.

The Āḻvār would want to know when he can enjoy the supreme bliss of beholding the Lord who can undoubtedly cut out all his foes (impediments) even as He destroyed these formidable demons. In the first two songs of this decad, the Lord has been set out as the goal, the next five songs reveal that He is also the 'Means' for attaining Him while in this and the next two songs, He is shown as the great Redeemer, vanquishing the forces of evil and thus cutting out all our sins.

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kāṇṭum kolō, neñcamē!-kaṭiya viṇaiyē muyalum
āṇ tiṟal mīḷi moympiṇ arakkaṉ kulattait taṭintu,
mīṇṭum avaṉ tampikkē viri nīr ilaṅkai aruḷi,
āṇṭu, taṉ cōti pukka amarar ariyēṟṟiṇaiyē? (VII–6–9)

Translation

My mind, shall we at all behold the Chief of Celestials,
Who the clan routed of (Rāvaṇa) the formidable Asura bent on evil
And on the throne of Laṅkā, the peninsular Kingdom, installed (Vibhīṣaṇa), his brother, returned to Ayodhyā and there ruled
Thousands of years and then to the Celestium returned?

Note

The Āḻvāṟ enquires of his mind whether he will be able to behold Lord Rāma in the glorious setting in Heaven, surrounded by Angels, soaked in God-love, unlike the Earth where the ungodly aimed missiles at Him.

ēṟṟu-arum vaikuntattai aruḷum namakku-āyar kulattu
īṟṟu iḷam piḷḷai oṉṟāyp pukku, māyaṅkaḷē iyaṟṟi, [tu
kūṟṟu iyal kañcaṇaik koṉṟu aivarkku āy, koṭum cēṇai taṭin
ārṟal mikkāṉ, periya parañcōti pukka ariyē (VII–6–10)

Translation

Surely, we will be granted the Heaven, difficult to attain,
By the merciful Ari , Who entered Gokul as a Babe just born,
Worked many a wonder ere the devilish Kañcaṉ was by Him slain,
Got the armies of the cruel enemies routed, as a Partisan
Of the five brothers and repaired back to the High Heaven,
Still feeling that enough unto them hasn't been done.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār is now placating his mind to which he had posed the question, as in the last song.

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(ii) Kṛṣṇa, as a mere Babe and later, as a Boy, worked many wonders culminating in the slaying of the fiendish Kamsa who had tried all methods he could possibly conceive of, to do away with the Divine Child. And when Kṛṣṇa came of age, He controlled the wonderful military strategy in that great battle at Kurukṣetra and led the Pāṇḍavas to victory against the evil-minded Kauravas. Having done so much, the Lord still felt He had not done enough unto His devotees. How magnanimous of Him! And what more? Even after His return to Heaven, His fury over the demoniac kamsa, Duryodhana etc., remained unabated.

pukka ari uru āy, avuṇaṉ uṭal kīṇṭu, ukanta,
cakkarac celvaṉ-taṉṉaik kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
mikka ōr āyirattuḷ ivai pattum vallār-avarait
tokku, pallāṇṭu icaittu, kavariceyvar ēḷaiyarē. (VII–6–11)

Translation

Those that are well-versed in these songs ten
Out of the illustrious thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, adoring Tirumāl, wielding the discus fine,
Who, as the Man-Lion marvellous, emerged and tore open
Avuṇaṉ's body, will the High Heaven attain
And there the damsels bright will adore them and entertain.

Note

Although the Lord did not wield the discus or, for the matter of that, any other weapon during His Avatāra as Nara-Simhā, it could be seen from 'Sudarśana Śatakam' that that the aura of Sudarśan (Discus) permeated Narasimha's nails, which tore open Avuṇaṉ's (Hiraṇya's) body. The chanters of this decad will have a good reception in Heaven, attended upon by the Apsarās over there. See also X-9-7.

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Seventh Centum Seventh Decad (VII-7)
(Ēḻaiyar āvi)

Preamble

The soul-stirring utterances of the Saint, as in the last decad, should indeed have gone straight to the Lord in Heaven. In a way, the Lord would seem to have pacified the Āḻvār by enabling him to comprehend mentally His exquisite Form, limb by limb. Led away by the Lord's charming beauty, the Āḻvār, aims at physical enjoyment of the Lord's exquisite Form, with outstretched hands and feels frustrated when such an experience is denied to him. Thrown into deep dejection, the Āḻvār, once again (figuratively) transformed as the Nāyakī, hits back the mates and elders. She asserts that she could hardly yield to their threats and cajoling, overwhelmed as she was by the Lord's bewitching Form, in all its details, on a par with physical perception through the senses.

This decad is similar to V-5 and yet, there is a difference between the two. There was an alternation of the Āḻvār's rejoicing and regret, in the earlier decad, while, in the current one, the expression of stinging regret dominates, in so far as the Āḻvār could not envision the Lord's Form as a whole, but perceive only one limb, at a time, whetting his appetite, all the more, for visualising the Lord's Form, in its entirety. In this peculiar context, the Nāyakī would look upon the bewitching eyes of the Lord's as but death-dealing twins.

ēḻaiyar āvi uṉṉum iṉaik kūṟṟam kolō? aṟiyēṉ!
āḻi am kaṇṇa-pirāṉ tirukkaṇkaḷkolō? aṟiyēṉ!
cūḻavum tāmarai nāḷ-malar pōl vantu tōṉṟum kaṇṭīr;
tōḻiyarkāḷ! aṉṉaimīr! eṉ ceykēṉ-tuyāṟṟiyēṉē? (VII–7–1)

Translation

Ye, mates and elders, I know not whether what I see
Are death-dealing twins or the lovely eyes of Kaṇṇapirāṉ,
the sea-hued Lord;
Know ye that these are by me seen all around
Like lotus flowers in full bloom, tormenting poor me
And women-folks; how can I get over my distress indeed?

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Note

Of all the limbs of the Lord, His lotus eyes, which kept the Āḻvār dumbfounded, presented themselves before him first, because it was the Lord's bewitching eyes that attracted the Āḻvār unto Him, as confessed by him in the first of his four hymnals (*Tiruviruttam*). But then, why should he feel tormented by the vision instead of being delighted? Had the Lord's Form, as a whole, been perceived by him, surely, he would have revelled in that glorious vision. But now, the Lord would appear to indulge in some cruel fun at the expense of the Āḻvār, by showing him His limbs, one by one, and watching his reaction thereto. The Āḻvār exclaims that these very eyes that attract the women-folks, could also prove fatal if their ardent aspirations to enjoy Him, roused by these eyes, are not fulfilled betimes. And again, being seen all round like lotus in full bloom, they oppress him without leaving him any chance to miss it by turning his attention elsewhere. Indeed the Lord's bewitching eyes would cast their spell on the Lord Himself if only He beheld them in a mirror.

āṭṭiyum tūṟṟiyum niṉṟu, aṉṉaimīr eṉṉai nīr nalintu eṉ?
māṭṭu uyar kaṟpakattiṉ valliyō? koḻuntō? aṟiyēṉ!
īṭṭiya veṇṇey uṇṭāṉ tirumūkku eṉatu āviyuḷḷē
māṭṭiya val viḻakkiṉ cuṭarāy niṟkum-vāliyatē. (VII–7–2)

Translation

Ye, elders, there's no use your prodding and rebuking me,
I know not whether 'tis the creeper or the leaf of 'kaṟpaka' tree.
That does the Lord's eyes adjoin or the nose of the One that ate
Butter by stealth, blazing like a steady flame bright, in my heart.

Note

Now it is the Lord's charming nose, in between the pair of lotus-eyes, that torments the Nāyakī. At first sight, it looks like a 'Kaṟpaka' creeper or leaf adjoining the Lord's eyes. It is only on a closer examination, it turns out to be the Lord's nose. The nose instantly reminds the Āḻvār of

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Kṛṣṇa, as a child, having eaten the stored-up butter stealthily and exposed Himself by smearing the nose with the stolen butter, a tell-tale. The Nāyakī relates that incident as if she has perceived it with her eyes; actually, even the characteristic smell of butter she appreciates now in her mental vision. The elders, therefore, asked the Nāyakī to point out to them the Lord's nose with which she was so much obsessed, but she said it was shining forth in her heart (mind's eye) like a flame, steady and bright, as if to torment her with a vengeance.

vāliyatu ōr kaṉikol? viṉaiyāṯṯiyēṉ valviṉaikol?
kōlam tiraḷ pavaḷak koḻum tuṇṭamkolō? aṟiyēṉ!
nīla neṭu mukil pōl tirumēṉi ammāṉ toṇṭaivāy
ēḻum ticaiyuḷ ellām vantu tōṉṟum-eṉ iṉ uyirkkē! (VII–7–3)

Translation

Is this a fruit unique, ever *in tact*, or is it
This sinner's sin tough, that can't enojoy it right now or is it
A chip of coral, pretty and delicate, I know not;
The red lips, fruit-like of the cloud-hued Lord are seen
In every direction I turn, tormenting my life sweet.

Note

The Lord's red lips look like a red fruit which is ever fresh and knows no growth or decay; they also look like a chip of coral. The Nāyakī recognises on a closer look that they are but the lips of the cloud-hued Lord of bluish tint, which she would like to enjoy that very moment, but can't do so, because of her heavy sins standing in the way. The nectarean lips are indeed oppressive to the Nāyakī, in her present state of frustration, like nectar becoming a veritable poison, in so far as a sinner is concerned, precluding him from enjoying it. Surely, the Lord's lips would not lag behind His eyes and nose, in exhibiting to the Nāyakī their oppressive charm, making themselves distinctly visible wherever she turns, determined to end her life.

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iṉ uyirkku ēḻaiyarmēl vaḻaiyum iṇai nīla viṟkol-
maṉṉiya cīr mataṉaṉ karuppuc cilaikol?-mataṉaṉ-
taṉ uyirt tātai, kaṇṇa-perumāṉ puruvam? avaiyē
eṉ uyir mēlaṇavāy aṭukiṉṟaṇa-eṉṟum niṉṟē! (VII–7–4)

Translation

Well, is this a tantalising pair of bluish bows
Whose targets are the sweet lives of poor womenfolks
Or the amorous bow of Mataṉaṉ of undying charm,
Or his Sire, Kaṇṇaṉ's brows which fiercely aim
At my life, standing quite firm?

Notes

(i) And now, it is the turn of the Lord's brows, well bent like a pair of bows, to torment the Nāyakī and sap her life. The proverbial bows of 'Manmata' (Cupid) are known to attack their natural targets, the women.

(ii) Lord Kṛṣṇa could be regarded as the Father of Manmata, the deity of exquisite charm, inasmuch as He begot upon Rukmiṇi, Pradyumna, extremely charming, as it were, a re-incarnation of Manmata. Kaṇṇaṉ's brows bore such a perfect resemblance to the bows that they could be easily mistaken for each other.

eṉṟum niṉṟē tikaḻum ceyya īṉ cuṭar veṇ miṉṉukkol?
aṉṟi, eṉ āvi aṭum aṇi muttamkolō? aṟiyēṉ!
kuṉṟam eṭutta pirāṉ muṟuval eṉatu āvi aṭum;
oṉṟum aṟikiṉṟilēṉ, aṉṉaimīr!-eṉakku uyvu iṭamē! (VII–7–5)

Translation

I just don't know whether it is the lightning white
That stays and reveals the radiance red or pearls white,
In a cluster that does my life torment; well, these smiles
Of the Lord, Who lifted mount (Govardhan) aloft, do scorch my soul,
Oh, Elders, see I can't how I can survive at all.

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Note

The Lord's smiles are likened to the lightning, with this difference that unlike lightning which is seem during a split second, the lightning smiles of the lord stay on and reveal the radiance of His red lips on which they keep dancing. The smiles are also likened to white pearls. The Āḻvār seems to have currently on view the smiles on Lord Kṛṣṇa's lips when He was holding Mount Govardhana aloft. But then, there a whole township took shelter but poor Nāyakī cannot find a single spot where she can take shelter and escape from the current oppression. Speaking about the Lord's smiles, Śrī Nampiḷḷai admirably elucidates that they dance on His lips and are thus virtually at the entrance of the lips; they should, as such, have been dealt with first and the lips thereafter. The smiles, therefore, oppress the Nāyakī, now, resenting, as it were, their relegation from the natural order.

uyvu iṭam ēḷaiyarkkum, acurarkkum, arakkarkaṭkum
evviṭam eṉṟu ilaṅki, makaram taḷaikkum taḷirkol-
pai viṭap pāmbu-aṇaiyāṉ tiruk kuṇṭalak kātukaḷē?
kaiviṭal oṉṟum iṉṟi aṭukiṉṟaṇa-kāṇmiṉkaḷē! (VII–7–6)

Translation

Are these the leaves fish-shaped? No, these are the ears,
Bedecked with rings, studded with pearls, of the Lord Who has
As His bed, the hooded serpent poisonous, which finish off alike
Womenfolks, asuras and demons and torment me with no break.

Note

The ears of the Lord leave no chance of survival for the Asuras and Rākṣasas who will die of jealousy on beholding the charming lobes, and again, the weaker sex (women) would pine for the Lord and collapse due to the non-fulfilment of their aspirations. The Āḻvār feels tormented because he could not enjoy the Lord there and then, much as he pined for such enjoyment. It is not merely the natural charm of the Lord's ear-lobes that torments the Nāyakī

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but it stands heightened by the pearls worn on them and the back-drop of Ādiśeṣa on whom the Lord is reclining. So then, the poignancy of oppression from this source makes the earlier tormenters pale into insignificance, and they even appear comparatively as benefactors like charitable persons setting up booths to quench the thirst of the weary sojourners.

kāṉmiṉkaḷ, aṉṉaiyarkāḷ! eṉṟu kāṭṭum vakai aṟiyēṉ!
nāḷ maṉṉu veṇ tiṅkaḷkol, nayantārkaṭku naccu ilaikol,
cēṉ maṉṉu nāl taṭam tōḷ perumāṉ-taṉ tiru nutalē?
kōḷ maṉṉi āvi aṭum-koṭiyēṉ uyir kōḷ iḷaittē! (VII–7–7)

Translation

Whether ' tis the waxing moon in the mid-fortnight
Or the herb deadly unto God-lovers, say I can't.
Oh, Elders, how I wish I could show you what I behold!
But I know not how it can be done, well, ' tis the forehead
Of the Lord with shoulders four, stout and fine
That blisters this sinner's soul, out to snatch my life.

Notes

(i) The Lord's charming forehead is now visualised by the Nāyakī. She wants to show it to the elders around but she can't do so, it being only a mental vision confined to her. Nor can she ask them to see it because they are not similarly gifted with this vision. The Lord's sinewy shoulders have also been mentioned in this song to identity the forehead as that of the One whose shoulders, stout and fine, enthralled the Āḻvār even as they atrracted Hanumān, at first sight.

(ii) The Lord is indeed a delicious herb, as acknowledged by the Āḻvār himself in V-7, but He turns out to be deadly like poison, in the Nāyakī's present state of dejection.

(iii) If the Lord's charming features should turn out to be oppressive, it is because of the Āḻvār's sins, as he put it.

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kōḷ iḷait tāmaraiyum, koṭiyum, pavalamum, villum,
kōḷ iḷait taṉ muttamum, taḷirum, kuḷir vāṉ piṟaiyum,
kōḷ iḷaiyā uṭaiya koḷum cōtivaṭṭam kol-kaṇṇaṉ
kōḷ iḷai vāḷ-mukamāy, koṭiyēṉ uyir koḷkiṉṟatē? (VII–7–8)

Translation

The eyes like unto self-decorating lotus, the creeper-like nose,
Coral lips, leaf-like ear-lobes, brows well bent like bows,
The radiant smiles, like unto a jewel, the moon-like forehead
A veritable region of radiance galore, all these decorate
Kaṇṇaṉ, my Lord,
And His beaming face peeps out to sap this sinner's life alas!

Note

The aggregate charm of the various limbs of the Lord, detailed in the seven preceding songs, each one of which is a decoration by itself, is reflected in Kaṇṇaṉ's beaming face, a veritable region of radiance galore, which has, however, a devastating effect on the Saint in his present disconsolate state. If he sinks down instead of being boosted up by the glowing vision of the Lord's superlative charm, it is because of his sins which preclude the external perception of the Lord's charm as well.

koḷkiṉṟa kōḷ iruḷaic cukirntiṭṭa koḷum curuḷiṉ
uḷkoṇṭa nīla nal nūl taḷaikol? aṉṟu; māyaṉ kuḻal
viḷkiṉṟa pūṉ taṉ tuḻāy virai nāṟa vantu, eṉ uyiraik
kaḷkiṉṟavāṟu ariyīr, aṇṇaimīr! kaḷarā nirṟirē. (VII–7–9)

Translation

Is it that pitched darkness enveloping the whole world,
Compressed into dark-blue thread, neatly packed and rolled?
No, these are the lovely strands of hair of my wondrous Lord
Wafting the sweet fragrance of tuḷaci, cool and nice,
You, elders, know not how it steals away my life
And saying one thing or another, me you just chide.

Note

It is indeed a grand poetic imagery, the comparison of the peerless beauty of the Lord's locks. If the unwholesome

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part of the grim darkness, that gripped the entire universe. during the great deluge, were weeded out, the rest could be compressed into nice, dark-blue rolls, like unto cotton strands from which yarn is spun. Attempting a comparison like this unto the Lord's lovely locks, the Saint realises that comparisons, as a rule, are much-too-feeble when it is a matter of describing the Lord's beauty galore, defying description and he would, therefore, simply call them the locks of the wondrous Lord.

niṟṟi muṟṟattuḷ eṉṟu neritta kaiyar āy, eṉṉai nīr
cuṟṟiyum cūḻntum vaitir; cuṭarc cōti maṇi niṟam āy,
muṟṟa im mūvulakum virikiṉṟa cuṭar muṭikkē
oṟṟumai koṇṭatu uḷḷam; aṉṉaimīr! nacai eṉ nuṅkaṭkē?
(VII–7–10)

Translation

Elders, You rebuke me as being forward and twist
Your fingers, surrounding me for ever, in protest,
But 'tis no use your expecting me to get round,
For immersed in the Lord's resplendent crown is my mind.

Note

The Lord's radiant crown is shedding its lustre on all the worlds and the Nāyakī's mind stands rivetted to it. There is, therefore, no point in the elders blaming her as transgressing the feminine bounds of modesty and pulling her up all the time. On the other hand, she would expect them to take steps to hand her over to the Lord to whom she rightly belongs, having come of age for such consummation.

kaṭku ariya piramaṉ, civaṉ, intiraṉ eṉṟu ivarkkum
kaṭku ariya kaṇṇaṉaik kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
uṭku uṭai āyirattuḷ ivaiyum oru pattum vallār
uṭku uṭai vāṉavarōṭu uṭaṉāy eṉṟum māyārē. (VII–7–11)

Translation

Those that can recite these songs ten
Out of the thousand composed by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Presenting the picture of Lord Kaṇṇaṉ, true and graphic,

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And adoring Him, invisible to humans and exalted Devas alike,
Will for ever remain in the company of ardent Celestials in Heaven.

Note

Those that chant these ten songs don't have to languish without enjoying Lord Kṛṣṇa's Divine presence. They will remain in Heaven partaking of the eternal bliss of divine Service, along with the holy band of 'Nitya Sūrīs' inseparably. The entire hymnal of Tiruvāymoḻi depicts the Lord's Form, attributes and wealth faithfully. There lies its merit, its great strength.

It is noteworthy that the Lord, whom even the exalted Devas like Brahmā, Śiva, Indra and others cannot easily behold, made Himself visible to the Saint wherever he turned.

Seventh Centum—Eighth Decad (VII-8)
(Māyā! Vamanan̄ē!)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Alvar felt tormented by the mental vision of the Lord's limbs, one after the other, rousing his appetite for God-enjoyment all the more. The Lord would not, however, fulfil the Āḻvār's aspiration even now and is obviously waiting for the appropriate moment of consummation. The Āḻvār knows the Lord's mind all right but still he is egged on by the exuberance of his God-love to crave for immediate union. So great was his ardour that non-fulfilment thereof should have normally resulted in his immediate extinction. He was, however, still kept alive, much to his surprise and he enquired of the Lord how exactly He enacted this wonder. "Well," said the Lord "this is not the only wonder wrought by Me, better behold My kaleidoscopic cosmic wealth". The Lord thus exhibited unto the Āḻvār many wonders, as against just one on which he sought elucidation. Overawed by the amazing magnitude of the Lord's wealth and wonders, even as sage Akrūra beheld with dismay the Divine Brothers

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(Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa) inside the running water of river Yamunā, as well as on the river bank, the Āḻvār voices forth in this decad, his mental reactions to the wonderful phenomena in front of him. It might be recalled that the Lord had displayed unto the Āḻvār His cosmic wealth and splendour earlier also in III-4 and VI-3. In III-4, however, the Āḻvār just didn't know where to begin and what to say, unable to express himself with any degree of precision; in VI-3, the Lord revealed His extra-ordinary capacity to achieve the impossible and compose, with perfect ease, the incompatibles, the opposites, within His fold. And now, we see an over-awed Āḻvār attempting to describe the wonderful phenomena before him and seeking clarification from the Lord in respect of the bewildering complexities, baffling intellectual comprehension.

māyā! vāmaṇaṉē! matucūtā! nī aruḷāy;
tī āy, nīr āy, nilaṉ āy, vicumpu āy, kāl āy,
tāy āy, tantai āy, makkaḷ āy, maṟṟum āy, muṟṟum āy,
nī āy, nī niṉṟavāṟu-ivai eṉṉa niyāyaṅkaḷē! (VII–8–1)

Translation

Play, reveal unto me Your facets many, oh, Vāmaṇā!
My wondrous Lord, You slew the demons, (Madhu and Kaiṭabha),
You are the elements five and of us all, the mother, the father
And the progeny too and all else one can, by name, utter,
As well as those one can't utter; I can't comprehened how You are
Your Form unique and also stand in all things everywhere!

Note

Many indeed are the wonders performed by the Lord. As Vāmana, the Midget, He went to Mahābali, as soon as He emerged, compelled his attention, got the donation of land of three strides, expanded Himself and spanned the entire universe; He crushed to death, the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha under His thigh; He is at once fire and water, father and mother and their progeny as well, a unique position, none else can hold. Fire cannot be water and water cannot be fire; mother is different from father and the

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children are altogether separate entities. Well, all these pertain to His attribute of being all-pervading. His cosmic or universal form. And yet, the Āḻvār could enjoy, with perfect mental equanimity the Lord's resplendent personal Form, as in Heaven, the perennial spring of nectar which the denizens over there drink deep all the time, as well as His universal Form, permeating all things, all over. This is because His immanence is a matter of superb wonder which keeps the Saint aghast.

am kaḷ malart taṇ tuḷāy muṭi accutaṇē! aruḷāy;
tiṅkaḷum ñāyiṟum āy, ceḷum pal cuṭar āy, iruḷ āy,
poṅku poḷi maḷai āy, pukaḷ āy; paḷi āy, pinnum nī
vem kaṇ vem kūṟṟamum ām-ivai eṉṉa vicittiramē! (VII–8–2)

Translation

Oh, Accuta, wearing on Your lovely locks tuḷaci garland cool,
With honey-studded flowers, pray let me know what the wonder is,
That You are the Sun, the Moon, the bright stars in broad expanse,
And darkness too, the rains torrential, fame and ill-fame as well,
And then, the unrelenting Death with cruel eyes.

Notes

(i) Towards the end of the last song, the Āḻvār contemplated the Lord's exquisite personal Form. That has led him on to the description of the tuḷaci-bedecked locks of the Lord in this song.

(ii) The Sun generates enervating heat while the Moon spreads its radiance, cool and refreshing; the stars and planets affect people both ways, for good and bad; darkness, the antithesis of light, provides a facile cover for the lewd and the thief; the rains help to raise the crops to feed the lives of creatures; the Lord directs and controls all these and He is also the much-sought-after praise as well as the disdainful opprobrium; when the people in different worlds, commit unpardonable moral

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transgressions, He functions, as the unrelenting Agent of dissolution of the universe, being Yama's Yama. 'Mṛtyu' (Yama, the deity of death) is like unto the pickles in the eating plate. The pickles, with their appetising flavour and agreeable taste, serve as effective media for consuming food with great relish and ultimatemately, what remains of the pickles in the plate, is also consumed. Yama, functioning as the Lord's appointed agent for dissolution, is also consumed by the Lord likewise, at the end of each Epoch, marked by the great Deluge. The upaniṣads say: "Mrutyur yasya upasecanaṁ'. The Āḻvār seeks clarification from the Lord how He could at once be all these things notwithstanding their mutual incompatibility.

cittirat tēr valavā! tiruc cakkarattāy; aruḷāy;
ettaṉai ōr ukamum avai āy, avaṟṟuḷ iyalum
otta oṉ pal poruḷkaḷ ulappu illaṉa āy, viyavu āy,
vittakattāy niṟṟi nī-ivai eṉṉa viṭamaṅkaḷē! (VII–8–3)

Translation

Do unto me reveal, oh, marvellous Charioteer,
Wielding the discus lovely, the great wonder You are,
Holding the cycle of Yugas and their occurrences interpal,
The lovely things, vast and varied, all under Your control.

Note

The thing mentioned last in the preceding song was 'dissolution'. Speaking about dissolution, the Āḻvār would seem to have been reminded about the riddance by Lord Kṛṣṇā, of the entire mass of unwholesome burden on Mother Earth, through the annihilation of the armies in the great battle at Kurukṣetrā. It is well known to every Student of Mahā Bhārata that Lord Kṛṣṇā was the pivotal Figure around whom the whole thing revolved. The great Bhīṣma was heard to say that he would have routed the Pāṇḍavas and their soldiers, with just one arrow, but for Lord Kṛṣṇa functioning as Arjunā's Charioteer, plying it in an amazing manner. When Arjunā's horses were paralysed with thirst,

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the divine Charioteer could perform the miracle of getting water from the depth of the barren soil, by sending a shaft deep inside. Seeing this miracle, the monarchs, ranged opposite, sank down to the bottom-most depth of despair. And then, the Lord's discus could shut out the evening Sun and induct artificial sun-set, which lulled Jayadratha, the brother-in-law of Duryodhana into a sense of false security and made him fall an easy prey to Arjuna's revengeful arrow. Arjuna had sworn that he would avenge the death of his son, Abhimanyu, by killing his slayer, Jayadratha before sun-set that day. Mistaking the artificial sun-set induced by Kṛṣṇa by holding His discus aloft and shutting the Sun out for the real one, Jayadratha came out of his hiding place, feeling quite safe, when the Lord suddenly withdrew the discus and the sun shone again, making it easy for Arjuna to kill the enemy instantly. As regards this episode, there could arise a legitimate doubt, how the discus which is itself million times more radiant than the Sun, could, by merely shutting out the Sun, introduce darkness- 'Śudharśanaṁ Bhāskara Koṭi tulyaṁ'. Well, this is yet another miracle of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

The cycle of Yugas has been going on and each yuga is characterised by a special feature, which is its key or dominant note. And then, the created world of staggering diversity and strange incompatibility is held together by the wondrous Lord betokening His Omnipotence. The Āḻvār cannot but marvel at this.

kaḷ aviḷ tāmaraikkaṇ kaṇṇaṉē! eṉakku oṉṟu aruḷāy;
uḷḷatum illatum āy, ulappu illaṇa āy, viyavu āy,
veḷḷat taṭam kaṭaluḷ viṭa nāku-aṇaimēl maruvi,
uḷḷap pal yōku ceyti-ivai eṉṉa upāyaṅkaḷē! (VII–8–4)

Translation

Oh, Kaṇṇā, the lotus-eyed, pray clarify a thing unto me not clear,
The Master Supreme of all things and beings that You are—
The non-changing Individuals in many an assorted grade

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And the ever-changing things, vast and varied; in the Milk-ocean broad,;
You keep pondering, reposing on Your poisonous-serpent bed;
What are the plans up Your sleeves indeed?

Note

(i) The Āḻvār seems to question the Lord whether even He has to indulge in this kind of contèmplation, despite His omni- science and omnipotence and seeks clarification from Him as to what precisely He means to hit upon, as a result of such deep thinking in a state of Yoga-nidhrā (the highest form of activity).

(ii) The sentient beings (the Jīvas) do not change at all, only the material outer cloak, the body changes; on the other hand, the non-sentient things are ephemeral, in the sense that they undergo frequent changes of state. The Lord is the great ordainer of both the species. Innumerable indeed are the Jīvas, each one with its own propensities, accumulated wisdom and load of 'Karma' (deeds good and bad), unless the Jīva is God-bent, the Lord cannot possibly pull it up and naturally He keeps pondering over the ways and means of resuscitation of the Jīvas.

pācaṅkaḷ nīkki, eṉṉai uṉakkē aṟak koṇṭiṭṭu, nī
vāca malart taṇ tuḻāy muṭi māyavaṉē! aruḷāy;
kāyamum cīvaṉum āy, kaḻivu āy, piṟappu āy, piṉṉum, nī
māyaṅkaḷ ceytu vaitti-ivai eṉṉa mayakkukkaḷē! (VII–8–5)

Translation

My wondrous Lord, wearing tuḻacī, cool and fragrant, on Your locks fine!
You rid me of all things unwholesome and made me Your vassal
The body that binds and the bound souls, their growth and decline
Are all by You controlled and yet, You have kept me still
In this body foul, what glamour You find in it, please tell.

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Note

This is the key-song, providing the preamble for this decad. The Saint asks the Lord to elucidate the riddle of His keeping him, in this material body, in mundane surroundings, even after weaning him away from the worldly things and engendering in him inordinate God-love, brooking no further delay in its consummation. With all this special equipment provided unto him by the Lord Himself, the Āḻvār felt sanguine that the Lord had admitted him into His sweet fold. Prolongation of his stay in this abode of dark nescience, however, makes him doubt the Lord's intentions and hence the clarification now sought.

mayakkā! vāmaṇaṇē! mati āmvaṇṇam oṉṟu aruḷāy;
ayarppu āy, tēṟṟamum āy, aḻal āy, kuḷir āy, viyavu āy,
viyappu āy, veṉṟikaḷ āy, viṇai āy, payaṉ āy, piṉṉum, nī
tuyakku āy, nī niṉṟavāṟu-ivai eṉṉa tuyaraṅkaḷē! (VII–8–6)

Translation

Pray vouchsafe unto me clarity, oh, Vāmaṇa, of bewitching beauty,
The individuals caught up in the vortex of varying experiences,
Heat and cold, wonder and the wonderful, confusion and clarity
Victory and defeat, act good and bad and their consegueneces,
Are all by You ordained; but then, immense are the sorrows
Caused unto Your Subjects by such (sporting) activities of Yours.

Note

The Saint enquires of the Lord whether He would keep even His votaries, unto Him solely devoted, bewildered like the demoniac Mahābali. May be, it is all part of His līlā (Sport) but what a lot of distress it brings on His subjects!

tuyaraṅkaḷ ceyyum kaṉṉā! cuṭar nīḷ muṭiyāy! aruḷāy;
tuyaram cey māṉaṅkaḷ āy, mataṉ āki, ukavaikaḷ āy,
tuyaram cey kāmaṅkaḷ āy, tulai āy, nilai āy, naṭai āy,
tuyaraṅkaḷ ceytu vaitti-ivai eṉṉa cuṇṭāyaṅkaḷē! (VII–8–7)

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Translation

Oh, Kaṇṇā, sporting the radiant crown, putting me in great distress,
You set the temptations many and unwholesome desires,
Elation and lust breeding miseries, before all beings, stationary and mobile,
Pray let me know why You indulge in such sports vile.

Notes

(i) The Lord, proclaimed by the upaniṣads as an inexhaustible fountain of bliss, is addressed by the Saint, in this song, as the Inflictor of miseries. The fact of the matter is that, on visualising the Lord sporting the resplendent crown, the Saint's longing for communion with Him has been intensified and he feels miserable. This is but the language of the Saints, in such moments of desolation.

(ii) The unwholesome desires are those directed towards the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, straying away from God-head and remaining self-centred 'Soham' while the wholesome desires are those centred round God and His devotees (Dāsoham); the former breeds miseries while the latter is blissful.

eṉṉa cuṇṭāyaṅkaḷāl niṉṟiṭṭāy-eṉṉāl āḻum kaṇṇā?
iṉṉatu ōr taṉmaiyai eṉṟu uṉṉai yāvarkkum tēṟṟariyai;
muṉṉiya mūvulakum avai āy, avaṟṟaip paṭaittu,
piṉṉum uḷḷāy! puṟattāy!-ivai eṉṉa iyaṟkaikaḷē! (VII–8–8)

Translation

How sportive indeed You are, oh, Kaṇṇā, my Master,
None can comprehend how and what You are;
You are the Controller of the worlds three and their Creator,
And You also pervade them all, in and out, oh, what a power!

Notes

(i) The Lord's sports are many and inscrutable. Even the wisest and the most exalted can hardly plumb the depths of His mysteries, His disposition and dispensation.

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(ii) The Vedas proclaim that the Lord's immanence is full and complete, in and out, even inside the minutest object of sub-atomic size, which, of course, baffles intellectual comprehension.

eṉṉa iyaṟkaikaḷāl eṅṅaṉē niṉṟiṭṭāy-eṉ kaṇṇā?
tuṉṉu karacaraṇam mutalāka ellā uṟuppum
uṇṇu cuvai, oḷi, ūṟu oli, nāṟṟam, muṟṟum nīyē;
uṇṇai uṇaravuṟil. ulappu illai-nuṇukkaṅkaḷē. (VII–8–9)

Translation

Oh, Kaṇṇā, my Lord, when one defines You, there's no end
To Your intricacies, the mode and manner in which You stand,
The senses five You control, taste, light and sound,
Touch and smell to enjoying which the various organs contend.

Note

The intricate glory of the Lord with its innumerable facets defies description and baffles scrutiny. The deeds performed by the vast multitude of His subjects, with the help of the bodies and limbs dowered on them by Lord, the senses five and their subtle bases, the elements from which they emanate, all these are directed and controlled by the Lord, standing within all things and beings; There is no end to such intricacies.

illai nuṇukkaṅkaḷē itaṉil piṟitu eṉṉum vaṇṇam
tollai nal nūlil coṉṉa uruvum, aruvum nīyē;
allit tuḻāy alaṅkal aṇi mārpa! eṉ accutaṉē!
vallatu ōr vaṇṇam coṉṉal, atuvē uṉakku ām vaṇṇamē.
(VII–8–10)

Translation

My Lord, Accyuta, sporting on Your lovely chest a garland of tuḻaci and lotus!
You inhere in shapely things non-sentient and sentient beings formless,

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(Both in the subtle and gross states), as revealed by Vedas, hoary and immaculate;
Yet You are just what Your devotees comprehend of You and contemplate.

Note

Both in the unmanifest (subtle) state and the manifest (gross) state, the Lord is in conjunction with the formless individual souls and the shapely non-sentient things. This is revealed by the Vedas, hoary and authentic. He is also visualised by the Saint, in His unique Form, bedecked with flowers and bejewelled, wielding conch and discus. Even the wisest sages and the most exalted Devas can touch only a fringe of His glory, attributes and cosmic wealth. And yet, the Lord thinks, He is no more than what His devotees comprehend of Him and meditate upon, for He loves them so well.

ām vaṇṇam iṉṉatu oṉṟu eṉṟu aṟivatu ariya ariyai
ām vaṇṇattāl kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ aṟintu uraitta
ām vaṇṇa oṇ tamiḻkaḷ ivai āyirattuḷ ip pattum
ām vaṇṇattāl uraippār amaintār, tamakku eṉṟaikkumē.
(VII–8–11)

Translation

Those who chant, as best as they can, these songs ten
Out of the thousand elegant Tamil songs of Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ
Revealing the Lord, difficult to comprehend but by him well discerned,
Will for ever enjoy undiminished, the bliss divine.

Notes

(i) The Scriptural texts contain many apparent discrepancies, one text seeming to contradict or be at variance with another and only the devout, blessed by the Lord Himself with clarity of vision and understanding, as in the case of Saint Nāmmāḻvār, can reconcile these apparent discrepancies and get at the Spiritual truths, in their correct perspective, shorn of all doubts, deviations and discrepancies.

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(ii) Those that recite this decad will enjoy the Āḻvār's grace and be thus assured of an unbroken enjoyment of eternal Divine bliss, without being put to the necessity of direct supplication to the Lord. As Nampiḷḷai puts it, these chanters do not have to drink water off the Lord's sleeves.

Seventh Centum—Ninth Decad (VII-9)
(Eṉṟaikkum)

Preamble

It was indeed the Lord's ingenuity that was in full evidence in the last decad, whereby He could gain time and divert the attention of the Āḻvār, astounded by the bewildering net-work of His superb wonders. In fact, we have seen this kind of happening all along, the appeasement of the Āḻvār at every turn by the Lord, exhibiting one or the other of His special traits and prolonging his stay in this abode. But now, the Āḻvār is determined to clinch the issue and demand of the Lord, what precisely makes Him resort to such tantalising tactics, without responding to the request made by him far back, in the opening song of his very first hymnal (Tiruviruttam) that he should be lifted from this foul body, full of dirt and devilry. Was there anything wanting in regard to his yearning or did the Lod's capacity to salve him decline? No, neither this nor that. But then, why should the Lord extend his stay in this cussed land with its sordid surroundings? Well, this is precisely the Āḻvār's query unto the Supreme Lord, to which the Lord's answer is "Āḻvār! You jolly well know my intention and yet speak as if you are ignorant. Well, I have kept you in this abode to get from you the soul-stirring hymns of unparalleled sweetness for the edification and enjoyment of Myself and My devotees even as I kept the wise Bhīsmā in the specially erected bed of arrows for quite some length of time and enriched the world through the dissemination of knowledge by that great Savant". The Āḻvār feels overawed by the Lord's tender solicitude and extraordinary love for him and exclaims: "My Lord, You are known to be above all wants and it is indeed very strange that you too should be suffering from a want like this. Even assuming that you have one such desire, You could have easily got it fulfilled

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by sages Vālmīki, Vyāsa, Parāśara and others of that eminent order or by the first three Āḻvārs, the divine bards, *par excellence*. It is indeed amazing that You should have chosen me, the lowliest of the lowly, absolutely ill-equipped, for this great assignment. This is indeed the limit of Your loving condescension."

And so, in this decad, the Āḻvār gratefully acknowledges the Lord's great gesture, perplexed a good deal, at the same time, over his own inability to recompense Him.

eṉṟaikkum eṉṉai uyyakkoṇṭu pōkiya
aṉṟaikku aṉṟu eṉṉait taṉṉākki, eṉṉāl taṉṉai
iṉ tamiḻ pāṭiya Īcaṉai, ātiyāy
niṉṟa eṉ ēōtiyai, eṉ colli niṟpanō? (VII–9–1)

Translation

Strayed I from the Lord for long and yet He did admit
Me unto His fold firm and blest me in ample measure,
Knowledge, strength and all He did on me shower,
Putting me with Him on a par and by His charm exquisite
Inspired me and brought out this hymnal sweet
How can I His grace galore express indeed?

Note

The Saint thaws down in gratitude over the Lord's enormous grace in getting hymnals sung through him, duly equipping him for this assignment. Indeed, the outpourings of Saints are all inspired by God and therefore it is that the Āḻvār does not claim authorship for the hymnal, sung by the Lord through him as His mouth-piece. This hymnal is claimed to be sweet because the authorship vests in the Lord. Otherwise, it ill-becomes a poet to glorify his own poems. As Nampiḷḷai would put it the liberated soul, that goes to Heaven, sings there the Sâma Veda in sheer joy. Likewise, the Alvar gives vent to his joy by singing 'Tiruvāymoḷi' and the Lord, attracted by it, participates in the singing Himself and elaborates. It is just like the teacher holding the finger of the young pupil and writing; the little lad pushes the pencil in one direction and the teacher corrects it and makes good the lapses of the young chap. And again, the Lord set aside the mantle and revealed His exquisite

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Form to the Āḻvār who stood enthralled by it and shouted with Joy, which, in turn, took the form of this hymnal.

eṉ colli nirpaṉ-eṉ iṉ uyir iṉṟu oṉṟāy,
eṉ collāl yāṉ coṉṉa iṉ kavi eṉpittu,
taṉ collāl tāṉ taṉṉaik kīrttitta māyaṉ, eṉ
muṉ collum mūvuruvām mutalvaṉē? (VII–9–2)

Translation

How shall I my gratitude express unto the Primate,
Who as Trinity functions and Who would from within me dictate
And sing His glory in words, this mean vassal would repeat,
Bring out this hymnal and, as its author, make me out?

Note

The Āḻvār is indeed at a loss to find words to express the boundless grace of the Lord, who weaned him away from his waywardness and chose him as His mouthpiece to repeat the words dictated by Him and then glorified him as the great author of this grand hymnal. This is just like His discharging the cosmic functions through Brahmā, Rudra, Indra and the whole hierarchy, standing within them all as their Internal Controller. The Āḻvār, it will thus be seen, does not own authorship of the hymnals sung by him and makes it out as the Lord's own utterances through the medium of His beloved Saints. Even as the minor deities are made by Him to appear as Creator of the worlds, Destroyer of Tṛpura the (three flying citadels) and so on, in respect of acts actually performed by the Lord as their Internal Controller, He makes it appear that the Āḻvār is the author of this hymnal. Had the Lord uttered this hymnal directly, it would be just another piece like His Gītā and be far from the juicy thing it is, extremely delectable, coming as it does from the month of the Saint. Apart from the fact that the Lord attaches more importance to the utterances of His devotees than to His own, Nampi Tiruvaḻuti Nāṭu Tācar would illustrate the relative importance of the utterances of the Lord and the Āḻvār and their

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impact on an assembly of learned men, as follows: When a person, reciting Ślokas from Bhagavad Gītā went there a-begging, they just dismissed him with a handful of rice, without allowing him a place in their midst. On the other hand, when an itinerant came across, warbling the sweet songs of Tiruvāymoḷi, the whole town and the Deity enshrined there, as well, rose to greet him, escorted him to places assigned by them with competitive exuberance and treated him with the utmost respect and hospitality.

ām mutalvaṉ ivaṉ eṉṟu taṉ tēṟṟi, eṉ
nā mutal vantu pukuntu, nal iṉ kavi
tū mutal pattarkkut tāṉ taṉṉaic coṉṉa eṉ
vāy mutal appaṉai eṉṟu maṟappaṉō? (VII–9–3)

Translation

Shall I ever forget my Lord Who desired, I would better
Become Chief of Prapannas' clan and on me clarity bestowed,
Entered my tongue to sing songs delicious which unto the pious cater,
The Benefactor great, Who unto me the gift of speech endowed?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār gratefully acknowledges the Lord's assignment to him of the role of redeeming the worldlings, sunk in sorrow and despair, by instilling in him, as a preparatory measure, clarity of knowledge and understanding that He is the Supreme Lord of the Universe, the Sole Refuge of all His subjects. Bent upon redeeming the subjects in the 'Līlā Vibhūti' (Sportive Universe) and bringing them on a par with the denizens of Heaven, the Lord inspires His chosen few, His messengers. Tradition has it that, during his sojourn at Śrī Kāñci, the great Āḷavandār (Saint Yāmunācārya) spotted out, by mere insight, young Rāmānuja, seen in the company of Yādavaprakāśa, at the holy shrine of Lord Varadarāja, as the great religious reformer, the Chief Personage, who would, in the coming days, spread the gospel of Viśiṣṭādvaita actually known as 'Emperumāṉār

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Dharśana'. Āḷāvandār had no acquaintance with Rāmānuja nor did the latter know the former.

(ii) In the very manner of its birth, this hymnal (Tiruvāymoḷi) scores over Rāmāyaṇa. While the Lord stepped on to the Āḻvār's tongue and straightaway produced this great hymnal, Rāmāyaṇa had to pass through a number of intermediaries in succession, namely, Lord to Brahmā Brahmā to Sarasvatī and from her to Vālmīkī, in the sense that she entered Vālmīkī's tongue to enable the latter to sing the great epic.

appaṉai eṉru maṟappaṉ-eṉ ākiyē,
tapputal iṉṟi, taṉaik kavi tāṉ colli,
oppilāt tīviṉaiyēṉai uyyakkoṇṭu,
ceppamē ceytu. tirikiṉṟa cīrkaṇṭē? (VII–9–4)

Translation

How can I, at anytime, forget my Benefactor great,
Seeing His great love unto me, the sinner great,
Redeeming me, tending me all along and singing His glory great
Thro' me, taking care to see no blemish creeps in, at that?

Notes

(i) It is not a matter for any wonder if the Lord sang poems of His great glory Himself. But the real wonder is, He chose Caṭakōpaṉ, ill-equipped for hymning, to sing the songs and ensured, at the same time, their perfeectin, eliminating the risk of contamination through his association. "It is because of His omniscience and omnipotence that He could achieve this through me" says the Āḻvār, "notwithstanding my absolute incompetence and my sins galore, involving a good deal of reclamation".

(ii) Empār would reinforce the purport of this song, by saying: "when the Lord preaches directly, as He did, in His Song Celestial (Bhagavad Gītā), such gospel is indeed absolutely free from blemishes. On the other hand, when our human ingenuity is called into play,

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in bringing out laudatory hymns, it is laboured out, bearing the mark of our limitations. But when God chooses us as His select instrument for the propagation of His message to the world at large, He Himself speaks, untainted by the imperfections of His medium. As a matter of fact, He rids the medium of all imperfections and it is this that the Āḻvār gratefully acknowledges in this song".

[c.f. Milton's exclamation in his swan-song:

" Give me now my lyre, I feel the stirrings of a gift divine, within my bosom blows unearthly fire, Lit by no skill of mine".]

cīr kaṇṭukoṇṭu, tiruntu na iṉ, kavi
nērpaṭa yāṉ collum nīrmai ilāmaiyil,
ērvu ilā eṉṉait taṉṉākki, eṉṉāl taṉṉaip
pār paravu iṉ kavi pāṭum-paramarē. (VII–9–5)

Translation

The Lord Supreme blest me, least competent to hymn,
Thro' songs, sweet and pure, deeply absorbed in Him,
And the medium effective made of me, with Him on a par
To sing and spread His glory throughout the land, near and far.

Note

The Āḻvār says that he was not qualified to compose poems, as he did not have any poetic talent worth the name, and even assuming that he could compose poems, he was hardly eligible to sing the Lord's glory, as he didn't know a wee wit of His greatness and grandeur. But what has the Lord done? He has instilled in the Āḻvār the requisite knowledge and qualities and elevated him on a par with Him. The Lord sings through the Āḻvār and yet looks upon him as the Poet, *par excellence*. The Saint acknowledges this great gesture of the Lord Whose magnanimity knows no bounds, with melting tenderness of heart. Indeed, no further evidence is needed to establish the Lord's greatness.

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iṉ kavi pāṭum parama kavikaḷāl,
taṉ kavi tāṉ taṉṉaip pāṭuviyātu, iṉṟu
naṉku vantu, eṉṉuṭaṉ ākki, eṉṉāl taṉṉai
vaṉ kavi pāṭum-eṉ vaikunta nātaṉē! (VII–9–6)

Translation

Oh, how gracious it is of the Lord of celestials
To choose me as His instrument and shed on me His grace
To get His glory by me sung although He could very well
Press (the first three Āḻvārs), the sweet-singing poets supreme, into service!

Note

There have indeed been many sweet-singing poets combining poetic skill and piety, like Vyāsa, Parāśara and Vālmīki, the great Sanskrit poets and the first three Āḻvārs and 'Tirumaḻicai Āḻvār' who have many sweet, soul-stirring hymns in Tamil to their credit. The Lord could have got the 'Tiruvāymoḻi' also sung by these super-eminent poets and yet He deigned to shed His special grace on Nammāḻvār who came long after, and got these songs of His choice mouthed by him. The Lord revealed unto the Āḻvār His grandeur as the Lord of Heavens so that the latter could sing His glory. It was only when He heard His praise sung by the Āḻvār, He could feel His position as the Heavenly Lord, stable. Actually, the Heaven is the eternal land of unquestionable stability, well beyond the mischief of the deluge, when all the other worlds enter the Lord's stomach for sheer survival. And yet, the Lord is inclined to treat His transcendent glory in Heaven, on a par with the fame attained by Him through the Āḻvār's laudation.

vaikunta nātaṉ, eṉ valviṉai māyntu aṟac
cey kuntaṉ, taṉṉai eṉ ākki, eṉṉāl taṉṉai
vaikuntaṉ ākaṟ pukaḻa, vaṉ tīm kavi
cey kuntaṉ-taṉṉai, en nāḷ cintittu ārvaṉō? (VII–9–7)

Translation

My heart's fill I never can have, however long I muse
Over my beneficent Lord who did enthuse

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Me to sing songs, sweet beyond compare, of His glory
As the heavenly Lord, cleansing me of my sins gory
And putting me on a par with Him, mingling freely.

Note

The Lord of the Universe, Chief of the exalted Celestials has condescended to shed His limitless grace on a great sinner, and cleanse him throughly, making him pure like Him. And what more? The regenerated Āḻvār, of immaculate purity, is made by Him to sing His heavenly glory and grandeur to His great delectation. It is indeed amazing that the Lord should feel that He flourishes only as a result of the Āḻvār's laudation; this is akin to a father, who gifted away a cow to his son, getting back the same cow as the latter's gift. So great is the Lord's loving condescension that the Āḻvār can't but muse over it endlessly. Even so, he cannot do adequate justice, seeing that the span of life is much-too-short while the magnitude of the favours heaped on him by the Lord is much-too-large.

ārvaṉō, āḻi aṅkai em pirāṉ pukaḻ
pār, viṇ, nīr, muṟṟum kalantu parukilum-
ērvu ilā eṉṉait taṉṉākki, eṉṉāl taṉṉaic
cīrpeṟa iṉ kavi coṉṉa tiṟattukkē? (VII–9–8)

Translation

Will I reach the end of satisfaction, if all the worlds,
Up and down and those in the Milk-ocean assembled
And praised the Lord, wielding the discus, Who made me laud
Him, in hymns sweet, raising unto His level me, a mere dud?

Note

Yet another way of interpreting this song could be as follows: Even if the Āḻvār acquired the combined power of speech of the denizens of Earth, Heaven and the Milk-ocean, and expressed his gratitude for the Lord who chose him as His instrument for singing 'Tiruvāymoḷi', he can never reach the end of exhaustion. This is so, because the Lord not merely made the Āḻvār sing His glory, despite the absence

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of either the inclination or the competence therefor and on the top of that, He felt elated that His glory was heightened by the Āḻvār's laudation. Even otherwise, the songs He made the Āḻvār sing are so very sweet and before this favour of His, all the others heaped on him pale into insignificance.

tiṟattukku ēy tuppuravu ām tirumāliṉ cīr
iṟappu etir kālam parukilum, ārvaṉō—
maṟappu, ilā eṉṉait taṉṉākki, eṉṉāl taṉṉai
uṟap pala iṉ kavi coṉṉa utavikkē? (VII–9–9)

Translation

Were I to muster back the entire past and assemble
The whole future, right now, and enjoy the glory great
Of the potent Lord, who unto His level did elevate
Me, totally oblivious of Him, and made me warble
Many a sweet song proclaiming His prowess great,
I would still never feel satiate.

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḻvār mustered the combined power of speech of the denizens, currently on Earth, Heaven and Milk-ocean but now he invokes the aid of those who dwelt in those places in the past as well as the future inhabitants; with his insatiable ardour, he feels that all these agencies, put together, would still be inadequate.

utavik kaimmāṟu eṉ uyir eṉṉa uṟṟu eṉṉil,
atuvum maṟṟu āṅkavaṉ taṉṉatu; eṉṉāl taṉṉaip
pataviya iṉ kavi pāṭiya appaṉukku
etuvum oṉṟum illai ceyvatu-iṅkum aṅkē. (VII–9–10)

Translation

There's nothing in all the worlds, here, there and everywhere
With which to recompense the Lord Who made me hymn
Songs sweet, this grand Hymnal adoring Him;

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Methought I could unto Him my soul offer
But then even that is but His own.

Note

There's no question of repaying the Lord's extraordinary kindness; even otherwise, there is nothing the Āḻvār could call his own, which unto the Lord be could offer. Even the soul is not his but belongs to Him as His vassal from time immemorial. At least, in this land of dark nescience, people with their erronerous notions of 'I' and 'Mine' might commit the mistake of offering something to the Lord as their own and realise their mistake later on with the dawn of true knowledge regarding their essential nature. Surely, there is hardly any scope for the commission of a similar mistake in the yonder heaven populated by the 'Nityās' and 'Muktās', duly enlightened.

iṅkum aṅkum tirumāl aṉṟi iṉmai kaṇṭu,
aṅṅaṇē vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
iṉṉaṇē coṉṉa ōr āyirattu ip pattum,
eṅṅaṇē colliṉum, iṉpam payakkumē. (VII–9–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand sung
By that great Saint, Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
With no Refuge, both here and in Heaven,
Other than 'Tirumāl', will breed joy, in whatever manner sung.

Note

This decad, whether sung with devotion or otherwise, will breed joy. The Āḻvār, who heads the clan of 'Praparnas' looks upon the Supreme Lord, the Spouse of Mahālakṣmī, as the Sole Refuge, both here, in the state of supplication and in Heaven, after attaining the final state of bissful union with the Lord. These songs, whether sung mechanically or with the ardour of the triple faculties of thought, words and deed, will generate joy on a par with the perrenial bliss of communion with the Lord. Certainly it goes without saying that it will be ideal if one sang these songs with due fervour.

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Seventh Centum—Tenth Decad (VII-10)
(Inpam payakka)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḻvār, who thought in terms of repaying the Lord's kindness in choosing him, of all persons, for the sacred mission of singing 'Tiruvāymoḻi', was bewildered on finding nothing, he could offer unto the Lord, for there wasn't anything he could call his own and the Lord, who is above wants of any kind, would need anything from him either. The merciful Lord would not, however, keep a devotee of such a high order in a state of mental torture. And so, He told the Āḻvār that he too would be given a chance to fulfil his desire by singing this hymnal in the pilgrim centre, called 'Tiruvāṟaṉvilai' (Kerala State), unto Him and His Divine Consorts, much to Their delectation. It may be recalled, at this stage, that Śrī Rāma listened to His own story, Rāmāyaṇa, sung by Kuśa and Lava, the Divine lads, His own progeny. Even so, it was not on all fours with the assignment currently given to the Āḻvār by the Lord. There Śrī Rāma was alone when He granted audience to the young minstrels, having got separated from Sītā, the Divine Mother, whose story, (Sītāyāś caritam mahat) Rāmāyaṇa virtually is. But here, the Lord, in His Iconic form, is looking forward to the ecstatic experience of listening to the rapturous songs of Tiruvāymoḻi, sung by the love-intoxicated Āḻvār, in the company of His Divine Consorts. The Āḻvār leaps with joy, finding that the Lord not only got the hymns sung by him but was also intent upon listening to his chanting them. How gracious of Him indeed! The Āḻvār, therefore, attempts to render the service assigned to him, at Tiruvāṟaṉviḻai in this decad, looking upon that holy place as his final goal, to the exclusion of all else, even as Hanumān said 'Bhāvonānyatragacchati', thereby expressing his stout determination not to forsake this land trodden upon by Lord Rāma and go elsewhere, not even the much-coveted Heaven. As a matter of fact, God would have nothing of our own and there is nothing we can call our own either. All that He expects from us, in return for all that He does, is to do His bidding and this is taken by Him as adequate expression of our gratitude.

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iṉpam payakka, eḻil malar mātarum, tāṉum, iv ēḻ ulakai,
iṉpam payakka, iṉitu uṭaṉ vīṟṟiruntu āḷkiṉṟa eṅkaḷ pirāṉ
aṉpuṟṟu amarntu, uṟaikiṉṟa aṇi poḻil cūḻ tiruvāṟaṉviḷai
aṉpuṟṟu amarntu, valañceytu kaitoḻum nāḷkaḷum ākumkolō?
(VII–10–1)

Translation

Will the good days draw near when I can lovingly go round
Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai which fine gardens surround
And worship my Sire who happily rules all the worlds
And now stays there in the gay company of Lakṣmī, the lotus-born?

Notes

(i) The Lord has indeed chosen an enchanting place from where He and His consort could enjoy listening to Tiruvāymoḻi recital by Saint Nammāḻvār. The Āḻvār is eagerly looking forward to his visit to this pilgrim centre.

(ii) Happy indeed is the blissful union of the Divine Couple and happy indeed are the subjects who behold this holy conjunction; on seeing the happiness of the subjects, the pleasure of the Divine couple gets enhanced like unto the mother happily watching the babe sucking milk from her breast.

(iii) When Śrī Rāma took leave of Queen Kauśalyā while setting out on exile, the venerable mother wished that that very day could also be the day of His return from exile, if at all he had to go. Likewise the Āḻvār pines for quick consummation of his desire to reach this holy centre.

ākumkol, aiyam oṉṟu iṉṟi?-akal iṭam muṟṟavum īr aṭiyē
ākumparicu nimirnta tirukkuṟaḷ appaṉ amarntu uṟaiyum
mākam tikaḷ koṭi māṭaṅkaḷ nīṭu maṭiḷ tiruvāṟaṉviḷai
mā kanta nīrkoṇṭu tūvi, valañceytu, kaitoḻak kūṭumkolō?
(VII–10–2)

Translation

Sprinkling water richly perfumed, shall I go round
And worship at Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai, the walled city with castles tall

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And banners aloft, where stays lovingly my Sire, Vāmaṇaṉ,
Who spanned
In two strides, with no misgivings whatever, the worlds one and
all?

Notes

(i) Even now, the devout pilgrims visiting this centre besmear the temple walls with sweet-smelling sandal paste, echoing the sentiments of the Āḻvār as disclosed by this song.

(ii) Did not Śatrugna sprinkle ice-cold water all the way from Nandigrām to the Āśram of Sage Bharadvāja, to greet Śrī Rāma's home-coming?

kūṭumkol vaikalum?-kōvintaṉai, matucūtaṉai, kōḻariyai,
āṭum paṟavaimicaik kaṇṭu, kaitoḻutu, aṉṟi, avaṉ uṟaiyum
pāṭum perum pukaḻ nāṉmaṟai, vēḷvi aintu, āṟu aṅkam, paṉṉi-
nīṭu poḻil tiruvāṟaṉviḷai toḻa vaykkum kol-niccalumē? [ṉar vāḷ
(VII–10–3)

Translation

Shall I be so blest that I keep adoring for ever
Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai, with its gardens big, where reside scholars,
Performing the rituals five, chanting aloud the Vedas four and
well-versed
In their six adjuncts and worship the buoyant Hari, mounted
on the victorious bird (Guaruḍa)
Kōvintaṉ, Matucūtaṉ, my Lord, who the demons slew?
When indeed will my longing deep be put through?

Note

Even as the Āḻvār adores the seat of the Lord and the devout over there more than the Lord Himself, the Lord reciprocated by adoring Kurukūr, the birth place of the Āḻvār. Therefore it was that He was speeding towards Kurukūr, mounted on Garuḍa. They have now met halfway at Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai. The Āḻvār enjoys the Lord at this holy centre as Kōvinta, the ardent Lover of the devout and as Hari and Matucūtaṉ, the Destroyer of the enemies of His devotees.

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vāykkumkol, niccalum, eppoḻutum maṇattuīnku niṇaikkappeṟa-
vāykkum karumpum perum cennelum vayal cūḻ tiruvāṟaṇviḷai
vāykkum perum pukaḻ mūvulaku īcaṇ, vaṭamaturaip piṟanta
vāykkum maṇi niṟak kaṇṇa-pirāṉ-taṉ malar aṭippōtukaḷē?
(VII–10–4)

Translation

When shall I the felicity acquire and without break contemplate
The blooming lotus feet of Kaṇṇa, my Sire of saphire hue delectable,
Who in Vaṭamaturai was born, the Supreme Lord of glory great,
Residing in Tiruvāṟaṇviḷai with sugar-canes stout, paddy crops rich and fields fertile?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār pines for perpetual contemplation of the lotus feet of the Lord enshrined in Tiruvāṟaṇviḷai, from where he is, even if it be not possible for him to go over there. This contemplation is to run on, all the time, unlike the daily rituals like 'Agnihotra' which are confined to certain parts of the day only.

(ii) There is a Jitantā śloka, recited at the end of the daily worship of the Lord, which brings out that the mere longing to serve the Lord, right in this mortal body, is rated by the devotee higher than his ascent to Heaven and occupying an exalted position there.

(ii) Here is an interesting anecdote:

Iḷayāṟṟukkuṭi Nampi, a great devotee used to go to the temple at Śrīraṅgam during the festivals only, and kept on musing, with great delight, the proceedings of the last festival, till he attended the next festival. With declining age, the centenarian-devotee could not be present on the opening day of a festival, a fact, which the Deity took special note of and exclaimed "We doubt very much whether this is at all our festival when we don't find our beloved Iḷayāṟṟukkuṭi Nampi around!" When the devotee presented himself with great dffiiculty on the sixth day of the festival, the Lord felt greatly pleased

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and enquired, "Nampi what can we do for you!" Nampi replied: "Sire this body dowered by you has done its job so far and now its mobility stands impaired". "Well, said the Lord", "if your body has dwindled, better stay with us". Nampi breathed his last by the time the Deity left the temple gate for the ceremonial procession.

malar aṭippōtukaḷ eṉ neñcattu eppoḻutum irutti vaṇaṅka,
palar aṭiyār muṉpu aruḷiya pāmpu-aṇai appaṉ amarntu uṟai-
malariṉ maṇi neṭu māṭaṅkaḷ nīṭu matiḷ tiruvāṟaṉviḷai [yum
ulakam maḷi pukaḷ pāṭa, nammēl viṉai oṉṟum nillā keṭumē.
(VII–10–5)

Translation

The moment we sing the glory great, spread far and wide,
Of the high-walled Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai where flowers abound,
The castles tall beam and the Lord reposes on serpent-bed,
Whose lotus feet lovely are for ever implanted in my mind,
Who chose me over many others and His grace on me shed
And made me wholly adore Him, all our sins will vanish indeed.

Note

The Āḻvār says, the Lord has shed His special grace on him, even as Śrī Rāma lavished special graces on Hanumān. See also notes under VII-9-6 in regard to the preferential treatment extended by the Lord to Nammāḻvār. Here is a fitting anecdote to illustrate how implicit faith in one's masters works miracles.

A Cōla king, named Kṛmikaṇṭa (the worm-necked) launched a crusade on Vaiṣṇavism, determined to break the images of Viṣṇu in the temples all over. On his, however, being warned by his advisers of the disaster that would befall him, if specially consecrated idols like those of Lord Raṅganātha were demolished, the King hit upon a safeguard, namely, the appointment of a competent sorcerer, who would, by special incantations, render the images effete, destroying their spiritual power. The sorcerer would make himself invisible by applying to his eyes a magical collyrium and then

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enter the Sanctoria of the Viṣṇu temples, extract the power from the idols enshrined there and then throw them into the sea. Greatly depressed by this turn of events and apprehending the calamitous repercussions of such an unholy project, Saint Rāmānuja had serious consultations with his Guru, Periya Nampi.

Periya Nampi decided that he shall pace round the periphery of the holy temple of Śrīraṅgam, thereby providing a cordon of protection and asked whether Śrī Rāmānuja could send a disciple to go with the great Master, literally as his shadow, with no thought of the self, as a separate entity. Śrī Rāmānuja very well knew that he had one such disciple, fully conforming to the specification of the master, in Kūrattāḻvāṉ and yet, he wanted the choice to be made by the master himself. Śrī Rāmānuja, therefore, told his master, "Sire, I wonder whether there is any one answering to your description, a camp follower, who hardly feels that he is following another". Periya Nampi was, however, quick to point out, "Well, Kūrattāḻvāṉ is surely one such. Let him be detailed for this service".

Even as Kūrattāḻvaṉ was spotted out by the master, out of so many, the Lord pitched upon Nammāḻvār for shedding on him the divine grace!

oṉṟum nillā keṭum muṟṟavum tīviṉai; uḷḷit toḻumiṉ toṇṭīr!-
aṉṟu aṅku amar veṉṟu uruppiṉi naṅkai aṇi neṭum tōḷ puṇarn-
eṉṟum eppōtum eṉ neñcam tutippa uḷḷē irukkiṉṟa pirāṉ, [tāṉ,
niṉṟa aṇi tiruvāṟaṉviḷai eṉṉum nīḷ nakaram-atuvē. (VII–10–6)

Translation

Ye, votaries, all your dire sins will get destroyed
If you could with reverence meditate on the city great,
The lovely Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai, where resides the Lord,
Who once came off with flying colours in a skirmish and caught

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Uruppiṇi, the damsel, bejewelled and enchanting, in embrace tight
And is in my mind firm, for me always to contemplate.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār beckons the Lord's votaries to just meditate on holy Tiruvāṟaṇviḷai to get all their ills and evils eradicated, *in totto*. We can, at best, wipe off only an infinitesimal fraction of our sins, through our own efforts, but the Lord's grace will wipe them off in full.

(ii) Uruppiṇi (Rukmiṇi), an incarnation of Mahalakṣmī, was the only daughter of Bhīṣmaka, king of Kuṇḍinam. She had five brothers. When she came of marriagable age, Śrī Kṛṣṇa went and sought out her hand but her brother Rukmaṇ opposed it. Intending that she should be married to Śiśupāla, he arranged for her Svayamvara, when several kings would assemble, from whom the bride could choose the one most eligible. But Rukmiṇi was so resolute that she would marry none but Kṛṣṇa and emboldened by this determination, she even sent a secret epistle to Kṛṣṇa, inviting him to come down at the appropriate moment and take her away some how, from those devils. Śrī Kṛṣṇa accordingly got hold of Rukmiṇi at the crucial moment, and drove her away openly. Śiśupāla and other kings, mustered by Rukmaṇ, who encountered Śrī Kṛṣṇa, were beaten off. The infuriated Rukmaṇ, however, pounced upon Kṛṣṇa, bent upon slaying Him and his life was spared by the Lord, at the special request of Rukimiṇi and, poor fellow, he was let off with mere disfigurement. (Srimad Bhāgavatam)

nīḷ nakaram atuvē; malarc cōlaikaḷ cūḻ tiruvāṟaṇviḷai
nīḷ nakarattu uṟaikiṉṟa pirāṉ, neṭumāl, kaṇṇaṉ viṇṇavar-kōṉ
vāṇapuram pukku, mukkaṇ-pirāṉait tolaiya, vem pōrkaḷ ceytu,
vāṇaṉai āyiram tōḷ tuṇittāṉ caraṇ aṉṟi, maṟṟu oṉṟu ilamē.
(VII–10–7)

Translation

Tiruvāṟaṇviḷai, the citadel huge, abounding in flower gardens,
Is our destination and our Sole Refuge is the Benefactor great,

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Of love unlimited, Who lovingly resides there, Chief of the denizens
Of Heaven, Lord Kaṇṇaṉ, WhoVāṇaṉ's thousand arms did smite,
Waging the battle fierce in his citadel, putting the tripled Rudra askance.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār considers this pilgrim centre, as his ultimate destination, even the High Heavens being relegated to a lower status and the Lord enshrined here, who vanquished the formidable foes, as his Sole Refuge. For details of Lord Kṛṣṇa's encounter with Bāṇāsura and his great allies, see notes under III-10-4.

(ii) No doubt, the heaven is the land of eternal bliss, the land whence there is no returning. And yet, Tiruvāṟanviḷai is so enchanting that even the Lord looks upon it on a par with heaven.

aṉṟi maṟṟu oṉṟu ilam niṉ caraṇē eṉṟu, akal irum poykaiyiṉvāy
niṉṟu, taṉ nīḷ kaḷal ēttiya āṉaiyiṉ neñcu iṭar tīrtta pirāṉ
ceṉṟu aṅku iṉitu uṟaikiṉṟa, ceḻum poḻil cūḻ, tiruvāṟaṉviḷai,
oṉṟi valañceyya oṉṟumō? tīviṉai uḷḷattiṉ cārvu allavē.

(VII–10–8)

Translation

Were it possible to visit and go round
Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai, by lovely gardens surrounded.
Where lovingly resides the Lord, Who the deep distress relieved
Of the Elephant in the pond huge, who his faith did pin
On His lovely feet, squeeze we can from our hearts all sins.

Note

The Lord, who rid Gajendra, the pious elephant, of dire distress, and now stays in Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai, will certainly cure us of all ills and evils. With its leg right in the jaws of the tough crocodile, the elephant was engaged in a titanic struggle for years, trying to extricate himself from the

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monster. When this self-effort, great and long, proved not only abortive but turned out to be a hindrance to the influx of the Lord's grace, the great devotee that the elephant was, he looked upon the Lord as the Sole Saviour and deliverance followed. The elephant was not in the least bothered about its own emaciation and eventual dissolution but its sole concern was to offer the lotus flower plucked by it, at such a heavy cost and still held in its trunk, at the feet of the Supreme Lord. What distressed the elephant even more, was his deep concern that the Lord's reputation as the Sole Saviour should not get tarnished by His not coming down to his rescue. It is precisely this, that has been referred to in this song, as the deep distress of the elephant. And so, the Lord feels benefited by the elephant, helping Him to redeem His reputation as the Sole Saviour of His subjects. This great trait of Lord Mahāviṣṇu of identifying Himself as the recipient of a favour when He is actually conferring one on His devotees and feeling distressed over the miseries of His subjects even more than they do, is inherited by His devotees. A true Vaiṣṇava (a votary of Lord Viṣṇu) is, therefore, one who possessed this remarkable trait.

tīviṉai uḷḷattiṉ cārvu alla āki, teḷi vicumpu ēṟaluṟṟāl,
nāviṉuḷḷum, uḷḷattuḷḷum, amainta toḻiliṉuḷḷum naviṉṟu,
yāvarum vantu vaṇaṅkum poḻil tiruvāṟaṉviḷai-ataṉai
mēvi valañceytu, kaitoḻak kūṭumkol? eṉṉum-eṉ cintaṉaiyē.
(VII–10–9)

Translation

With a mind thoroughly cleansed, rid of all sins,
I could perhaps reach Heaven and yet, in my thoughts do I
pine For lovely Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai where the pious with thorough discipline
Of word, deed and thought congregate and worship; I wish I would remain
In that holy centre, circumambulate and worship with joined palms.

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Note

The Āḻvār's desire to reach this pilgrim centre is so great that even the high Heaven recedes to the background. Therefore, his thoughts are wholly centred on whether he would at all be able to reach that centre, stay firmly there and go round the place with great piety. Not only that, he feels that this holy centre is so very enchanting that is is bound to attract even the denizens of Heaven.

cintai maṟṟoṉṟin tiṟattatu allāt taṉmai tēva-pirāṉ aṟiyum;
cintaiyiṉāl ceyva tāṉ aṟiyātaṉa māyaṅkaḷ oṉṟum illai-
cintaiyiṉāl, colliṉāl, ceykaiyāl, nilattēvar kuḻu vaṇaṅkum
cintai makiḻ tiruvāṟaṉviḷai uṟai tīrttaṉukku aṟṟa piṉṉē.
(VII–10–10)

Translation

There's hardly a thought that crosses one's mind,
The omniscient Lord cannot comprehend;
Surely, He knows that I think not of aught
But the Lord immaculate, Who remains enshrined
In Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai, that exilarates one's heart.
Worshipped by the devout thro' word, deed and thought.

Note

This song provides the reply to the question supposed to have been put to him as to what he would do in case the Lord forced him into Heaven, which he had been demanding from Him quite often before. The Lord, being all-knowing, He is well aware that the Āḻvār's mind now stands rivetted to Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai which has taken precedence over everything else, including the Heaven. Further, He is known to grant the boon prayed for by the subject, (Purusārta). That being the case, there is absolutely no risk of the Lord granting him anything other than that desired by him, even Heaven falling in the excluded category in this particular context. It is noteworthy that the Āḻvār does not even mouth the word. 'Heaven' and says, in general terms, that he does not think of anything else but the holy centre of Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai.

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tīrttaṉukku aṟṟapiṉ. maṟṟu ōr caraṇ illai eṉṟu eṇṇi, tīrttaṉukkē tīrtta maṉattaṉaṉ aki, ceḻuṅ kurukūre caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa tīrttaṅkaḷ āyirattuḷ iva pattum vallarkaḷait tēvar vaikaḷ tīrttaṅkaḷē eṉṟu pūcittu, nalku uraippar tam tēviyarkkē.

(VII–10–11)

Translation

Unto their spouses shall ever say the Celestials in Heaven,
That those well-versed in these songs ten
Out of the immaculate thousand of Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Dedicated to the immaculate Lord, as the sole Means
Are indeed very pure, entitled to great reverence.

Notes

(i) It has been given out here, as the benefit accruing to those chanting this decad, that the Eternal Heroes (Nitya Sūrīs), in Heaven, shall honour them a great deal and refer to them as of great sanctity, while talking to their spouses at the height of their joy born of their blemishless service unto Lord Vaikuṇṭanātha (the transcendent Lord in Heaven, in His 'Para' aspect). It is then that they feel inclined to divulge the secrets to their dear ones, even as the redoubted saint Rāmānuja divulged to those, eagerly assembled in front, the purport of the 'Carama Śloka', notwithstanding the oath of secrecy administered to him by his master, Goṣṭipūrṇar. Garuḍa has two wives, by name, Rudrā and Sukīrti while the wife of Śenāpathi (Cēṉai Mutaliyār) is Sūtravati. These pre-eminent 'Nityās' would always speak in superlative terms about the chanters of this decad.

(ii) *The Lord immaculate*: Himself of impeccable purity, He is also the great Sanctifier, Who renders His votaries also absolutely pure. River Gangā got sanctified by the touch of His feet and Śiva, in turn, got sanctified by holding Gangā on his matted locks.

(iii) *Immaculte thousand*: All the songs in this great hymnal are like unto as many sacred waters.

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THE CENTUM IN RETROSPECT
(DECAD WISE SUMMARY)

(VII-1) : *In the opening decad*, the Āḻvār follows up the trend of thought, as in VI-9-9, where he dreaded the mischief of the senses and the frightful possibility of his going astray in the event of the prolongation of his stay in this abode. If the Āḻvār dreads in this manner, despite his having taken a deep plunge into the ocean of divine consciousness, it is because this land is notorious for its corrupting influence, bringing within its dirty pale even the 'Nitya Sūris', the proximate attendants of the Lord in Heaven, should they *ever happen* to step on to this soil;

(VII-2) : The Āḻvār, whose stay in this abode is being prolongued by the Lord, despite his protestation, is once again (figuratively) transformed as the Nāyakī (Mistress), weighed down by melancholy too deep for words. The critical condition of the Nāyakī and her various moods are narrated *in the second decad* by the gnostic mother to Lord Raṅganātha, enshrined in Śrīraṅgam (Tamil Nadu), bending over her daughter, right in the Sanctum. The mother enquires of the Lord, the Sole Saviour, as to what His intentions are and how exactly He would like to deal with her love-lorn daughter. This decad, however, ends on a happy note, the mother being mighty glad that her daughter has, after all, attained the benign feet of Lord Raṅganā.he;

(VII-3) : The bliss of the union of the Nāyakī and Lord Raṅganātha having overflown its continents, the Lord hits upon a method whereby the God-enjoyment of the Nāyakī could be stabilised, instead of her being swept off by it. The Lord goes to Teṉtiruppēreyil (near the Āḻvār's birth place) on a hunting expedition, by way of relieving the distress of the people over there from the depredations of wild animals. Although the Nāyakī herself equipped Him with weapons and bid Him farewell, wishing Him success, yet she is all agog to go there herself, unable to brook separation from her Lord even for a short while. *In the third decad*, we see the Nāyakī insisting that she shall go, in the face of stiff opposition from her mother, mates and other kinsfolk. At best, she would allow them to escort her and leave her with the Lord, even if they cannot allow her to go alone;

(VII-4) . Just when the Nāyakī was attempting to go to Tiruppēreyil where the Lord had gone for game-hunting, he returned victorious. Exceedingly jubilant over the Lord's quick return from the victorious expedition, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī gets locked up in His sweet embrace, by way of relieving His fatigue (mental experience of course). In his current festive mood, the Āḻvār recounts *in the fourth decad* the Lord's wondrous deeds and benefaction, vast and varied, exclaiming, "What a marvel !" "What a wonder!" and so on.

(VII-5) : *In the fifth decad*, the Āḻvār cites some more achievements of the Lord, much to his own delectation. At the same time, he could not help wondering how the worldlings whose birthright it is to share this enjoyment,

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kept aloof from God and he even felt vexed with them for their callous indifference to Him, in the face of His numerous deeds, good and great, bringing to the fore His benevolent dispensations and loving condescension.

(Although it is all worded in the third person, this decad is indeed yet another address of the Āḻvār to *the worldly me*).

(VII-6) : Despite his enormous yearning, of unimaginable depth, the Āḻvār has not been able to experience the bliss of lasting communion with the Lord. Alternating between ravishing joy and deep dejection, as seen all along, the Āḻvār, in his present disconsolate state laments loudly, *in the sixth decad*, so as to melt even the stony hearts of the ungodly. In the first two songs of this decad, the Lord has been set out as the goal, the next five songs reveal Him as also the 'Means' for attaining Him while the three following songs highlight Him as the Great Redeemer, destroying the ungodly and saving the devout through His voluntary grace, cutting out all their impediments (sins).

(VII-7) : In response to the soul-stirring utterances of the Āḻvār, as in the sixth decad, the Lord enabled him to comprehend (mentally of course) His exquisite Form, limb by limb. Led away by the Lord's charming beauty, the Āḻvār aims at external perception and physical enjoyment of the Lord's enchanting Form, with outstretched hands but feels frustrated, when the experience longed for, is denied to him. The Āḻvār, once again transformed (figuratively) as Nāyakī, hits back the prodding mates and elders, overwhelmed by the Lord's bewitching beauty. But it is a note of stinging regret that runs through the *entire seventh decad* as the Nāyakī could not envision the Lord's Form as a whole, but perceive only one limb at a time, whetting her appetite all the more for the enjoyment of the Lord's Form, in its entirety;

(VII-8) : Cut out from the worldly moorings and with God-love welling up his bosom, by leaps and bounds, the Āḻvār craves for immediate union with the Lord. So great is the Āḻvār's ardour that non-realisation of his inordinate longing should have normally resulted in his collapse and extinction. It is, therefore, a matter of great wonder for him that he is still kept alive in this narrowing abode, with all its susceptibilities. When asked by him to elucidate this wonder wrought by the Lord, he exhibits unto the Āḻvār, many more wonders—His kaleidoscopic cosmic wealth. Thereupon, the Āḻvār voices forth *in the eighth decad* his mental reactions to the wonderful phenomena in front of him, besides seeking clarification from the Lord, in regard to the many bewildering complexities, baffling intellectual *comprehension*;

(VII-9) : Perplexed over the prolongation of his stay in this cussed land with its sordid surroundings, the Āḻvār elicits from the Lord his intention in this regard. The Āḻvār is informed that he has been kept in this abode in order to get from him, the soul-stirring hymns of unparalleled sweetness, for the edification and enjoyment of Himself and His devotees. Overawed by the Lord's tender solicitude and loving condescension, in choosing him for this assignment, in preference to the eminent sages like Vyāsa, Parāśara and Vālmīki and the sweet singing divine bards, *par excellence*, the first three

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Āḻvārs, the Āḻvār gratefully acknowledges *in the ninth decad* the Lord's great gesture, perplexed a great deal over his inability to recompense the Lord, as there was hardly anything he could call his own;

(VII-10) : The Lord has indeed chosen an enchanting place, namely, Tiruvāṟaṇviḷai (Kerala State) from where He and His dear Consort (Mahālakṣmī) could enjoy listening to Tiruvāymoḷi recital by Saint Nammāḻvār. The Āḻvār, whom we saw, in the ninth decad, remaining perplexed over his inability to recompense the Lord for the extraordinary grace shed by Him, was, therefore, given a chance to fulfil his heart's desire, by singing this great hymnal unto Him and His Consort, in that holy centre, much to Their delectation.—And so, *in the concluding decad of this Centum*, the Āḻvār attempts to render the service graciously assigned to him by the Lord. So great is his desire to reach this fascinating pilgrim centre, looking upon it as his ultimate destination, relegating even the high Heaven to the background.

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